CONSERVATIONISM AND FARMING IN NORTH QUEENSLAND, 1861-1970

Thesis submitted by

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STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

I declare that this thesis is my own work. My supervisor, Dr Russell McGregor, has guided me with suggestions for background reading, with conceptualising my problem and with editing, as stated in the acknowledgements. Beyond that I have worked alone and have received no financial assistance for the project.

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Many friends have given me encouragement, in particular Janina Mazierska, Peter Bell, Albert Speer and Don Gallagher. My mother, Rose Frazer, has been a constant, long-distance supporter. Thank you all.

ABSTRACT

This is a study of the ideas behind natural resource use in North Queensland. I argue that settlers followed an implicit code which valued caring for, as well as exploiting the land. The earliest settlers took pride in being pioneers who conquered, reshaped and harnessed Nature. Later generations could not claim this status, but found virtue in hard work and practicing a frugal, “tread-lightly” form of stewardship. Legislators promoted the settlement of the coastal strip with morally charged rhetoric: to secure the North for White Australia, to render the wilderness bountiful and produce contented human beings, away from dehumanising cities.

North Queensland’s conservation activists of the 1960s advocated a different vision to that of closer-settlement enthusiasts, yet they shared an ideal of a restorative working relationship between human beings and Nature. Naturalists in Cairns and Townsville in the 1930s and 40s had exercised public advocacy for conservation based on a sense of custodianship for native flora and fauna. Activists of the 1960s extended their stewardship to the North’s rain forests and the Great Barrier Reef.

The farmers’ stewardship and state’s piecemeal land-management and nature-conservation laws both seem to have assumed a safety net supplied by Nature entwined with Providence. In contrast, the activists

acted on a belief held by some conservationists since the 1870s, reinforced by evidence of damage since World War II, that Nature was being irreparably damaged and must be rescued.

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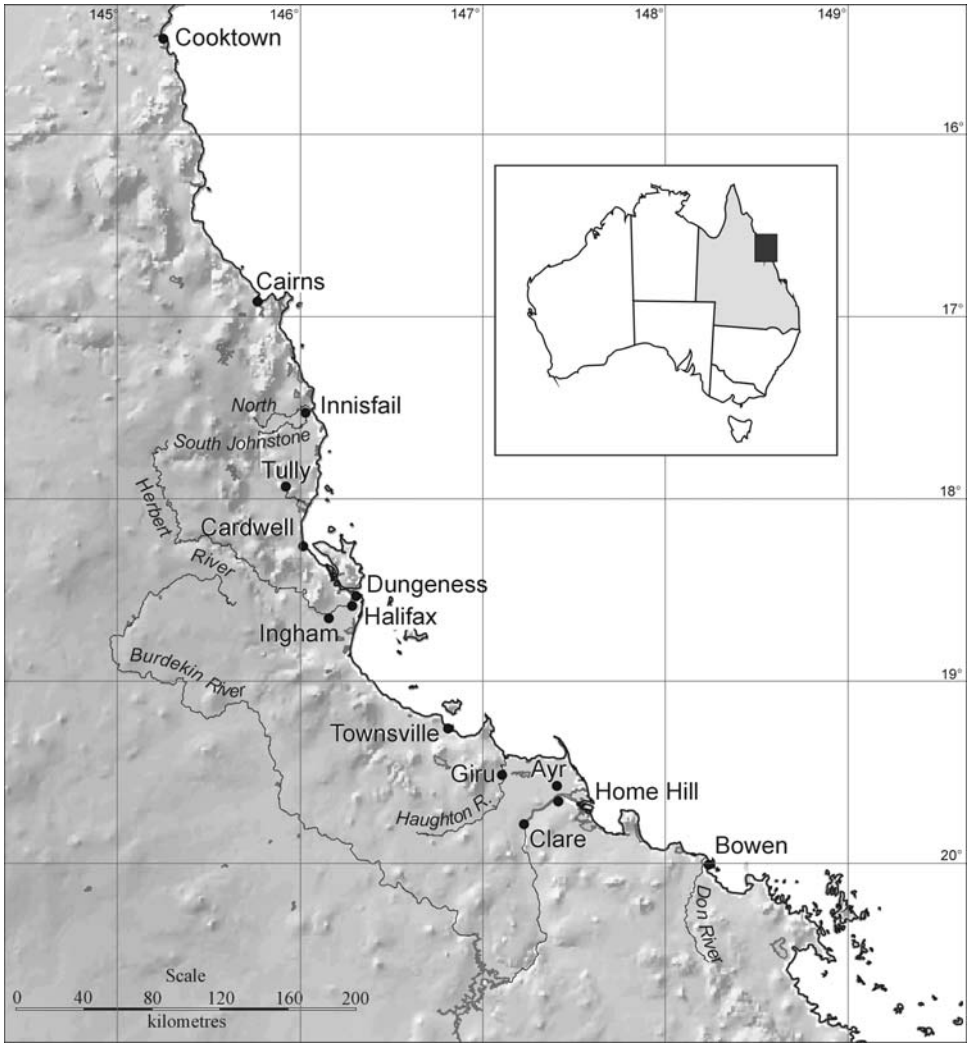

North Queensland, Bowen to Cooktown. Source: Geoscience Australia, 1:1000,000 scale vector data.

Introduction

Nature was an unbreakable, bountiful, capricious and eternal presence with an agency of its own in the dominant discourse about development of North Queensland, from the 1860s to 1960s. It was a multifaceted force to be harnessed, groomed and rendered useful. However, conservationists from Edmund Banfield onwards questioned this view. Their understanding evolved from seeing nature as a fragile, finite resource demanding custodianship to regarding it as the fabric of their own being. Judith Wright argued in 1968 that since "nature" existed only as a human construction, its nurturing or neglect reflected the health of humanity. She saw nature as a life process which humans could help creatively, or destroy. Her case for a "new kind of creative relationship" to rescue nature was based on her understanding, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, that "in our life alone does Nature live".[1]

The quest for harmony between humans and nature was central to the ideals of Queensland's closer-settlement movement, as well as 1960s environmentalists. Supporters of land settlement schemes, beginning in the 1880s, saw the fostering of an industrious yeomanry, bound to the land, as crucial to nation-building. "We invariably find that an agricultural people are ever the most patriotic, and will suffer the severest privations sooner than sever the link which binds them to the soil," *The Townsville Herald* asserted it 1889.[2] Judith Wright's case for stewardship of nature was similar also to the case put by the Apostolic Delegate to Australia, Archbishop P. Bernardini, at the opening of St Teresa's Agricultural College, Abergowrie, in 1934, for farmers

[1] Judith Wright, "Conservation as a Concept", *Quadrant,* no.51, volXII, January-February, 1968, quoting from S.T. Coleridge, "Dejection: An Ode" (1802).
[2] *The Townsville Herald,* 26 January, 1889.

to see themselves as co-workers with God, "conscious instruments" with Him, "daily renewing the marvellous works of creation".[3]

My thesis on the development of North Queensland is that, despite the hopes of closer-settlement and conservation theorists, most settlers eschewed any idealised restorative partnership with "nature". Farmers and members of naturalists' groups from the 1870s to 1950s became custodians of constructions such as "the soil", "the land", "the farm", "the bush" and "the wilderness". Farmers practised stewardship out of self-interest and occasionally for aesthetic or ethical reasons. Nature-lovers exercised an altruistic and utilitarian stewardship for rather randomly chosen tokens of nature, based on their sense of custodianship developed during field studies. Supporters of nature conservation who joined Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland branches in Innisfail and Townsville in 1966 and 1968, respectively, had begun to develop a global view by the early 1970s, driven by the fear that human beings were doing irreparable damage to nature. Their advocacy for the well-being of the whole planet grew more from the sense that human history was unavoidably meshed with nature than from any parochial or partisan cause.[4]

I began the thesis as an attempt to understand present-day friction between conservationists and farmers in North Queensland. I had heard many farmers assert that they were, in fact, the original conservationists, hence one of my central questions: was this so? I had a theory that farmers were really more careful than their critics asserted, because farming, by definition, implied care and maintenance of the land. Morally charged critiques of farming practices delivered by intrusive non-farmers seemed a likely cause of irritation

[3] *The North Queensland Register,* 28 July, 1934.
[4] Libby Robin, *Defending the Little Desert,* Melbourne, 1998, p.140, traces the concerns of Australian conservationists from anxiety at the loss of habitats in the 1960s to a fear for the future of nature generally in the 1970s.

John Howard, then Federal Opposition Leader, asserted in the 1996 election campaign, "We're all Greenies now". His colleague the Federal Environment Minister, Senator Robert Hill, made a similar claim in 1997, "everyone is now an environmentalist", asserting that the concerns of environmental activists in the 1970s had become mainstream concerns 20 years later.[5] However, my interviews with post-World War II settlers from the Ingham and Burdekin districts between 1999 and 2002 were complicated by what I felt was a reticence to discuss "conservationism", apparently because of the word's holier-than-thou aura. One of the interviews, with a farmer on the outskirts of Ayr, turned into a kind of confession of over-use of pesticides and blanket tree clearing.

The conservation activists of the 1960s were opposed more to the clearing of rainforests for farming and grazing ventures than to contentious farming practices.[6] Friction between activists and farmers was minimal in the North in this era. Billie Gill, a founding member of the Innisfail branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, recalls that farmers regarded their members as "a mob of nit wits".[7] The possibility that residues of insecticides or pesticides could harm the ecology of the Great Barrier Reef appears to have been first suggested in 1968 by Robert Endean, a marine biologist and chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Committee, in a report on a

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[5] Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environmental Movement*, Cambridge, 1999. pp.3, 263-4. Senator Robert Hill is cited in a transcript of a speech to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 15 May 1997. John Howard's assertion in the 1996 federal election campaign, "We're all Greenies now", is unsourced.

[6] John Busst, report of first annual general meeting of Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (Innisfail branch), 8 May, 1967, JCU Library Archives [JBC/MR/1]. The society asked the State Government to ban Tordon, a weed and tree killer with "permanent destructive residues", and to offer a tax incentive to farmers to preserve vegetation one and a half chains from all water courses; J. Busst to Federal Treasurer, Harold Holt, 30 August, 1965 [JBC/Corr/1] noted 87,000ac of rainforest had been "bulldozed totally out of existence" in Cardwell Shire in the previous two years.

[7] Billie Gill, e-mail to Ian Frazer, 21 November 2003.

Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreak.[8] However, in the 1980s and 90s, groups such as Greenpeace, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the North Queensland Conservation Council suggested that farms had degraded streams and wetlands and the Great Barrier Reef through poor management. Canegrowers, the sugar cane farmers' organisation, disagreed, asserting that there was no evidence that run-off of nutrients or pesticides had damaged the reef or wetlands. Meanwhile, the State Government passed laws to curb clearing on leasehold land to protect endangered fauna and flora. Some farmers resented this. [9]

Overall, my approach has been influenced by Greg Dening's definition of making history as a way of guarding the signatures human beings put on life, and of joining "the words spoken, the discoveries discovered" to a contemporary discourse.[10] The thesis is a study of ideas about the relationship between human beings and nature, specifically the Europeans who settled North Queensland.

Methodology

I have aimed to write a narrative of changing land use in North Queensland, followed by an analysis of these changes, successively, from the viewpoints of legislators, farmers and nature conservationists. While Geoffrey Bolton and Ross Fitzgerald provided a narrative framework for political and social changes in the

[8] James and Magarita Bowen, *The Great Barrier Reef, History, Science, Heritage*, Cambridge, 2002, p.325 cite Endean's report to Queensland Fisheries, 20 April, 1968, in which he suggested two theories for the Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreak which began in 1965: that the destruction of the giant triton, traditional predator of the starfish, by Japanese and Taiwanese fishing fleets had allowed the starfish to thrive, and that organochlorine contaminants might have built up in the plankton food chain and killed off natural predators of starfish larvae.

[9] For example, Ingham farmer Gerry Allingham, an honorary wildlife officer, complained in the *Townsville Bulletin*, 12 July, 1995, at the Department of Environment's decision to ban his clearing 80ha of his 1100ha property near Cardwell, to protect the habitat of the endangered mahogany glider. He said he had never seen a mahogany glider on his place but accepted that there had been sightings by experts. One of 15 landholders issued with interim conservation orders, his main complaint was the department's "heavy handed" approach.

[10] Greg Dening, *The Contemporary Pacific,* vol.1, no.1 and 2, 1989, introduction, p.138.

North from 1861 to 1970, there is no comprehensive history of land use in this period.[11] My sketch of the development of the sugar industry is based on Department of Agriculture statistics, *Australian Sugar Yearbooks*, reports of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, growers' assignments recorded annually in the *Queensland Government Gazette* and theses by John Tanzer (1979) and Peter Griggs (1989).[12]

The stories about nature and "stories about stories about nature" which William Cronon[13] says are needed to make environmental history can be found in letters, poetry, novels, pioneering reminiscences, newspapers, natural history club newsletters, oral history interviews, statements to Royal Commissions, parliamentary debates and government reports. These stories can also be inferred from land-use and population statistics, photographs, aerial photographs and in certain buildings and monuments. I have looked for what Donald Worster described in 1979 as "contradictory values", such as religious ideas, family institutions and social traditions that had opposed, modified and sometimes reinforced the capitalist ethos.[14]

I have used statements from all of these sources to guess at what pioneers, farmers, townspeople, nature conservationists and legislators thought about nature in the form of "the land", "the soil", "the farm", "the bush" and "the jungle". The farmers can be heard in reports of four Queensland government inquiries: the 1889 Royal Commission into the General Condition of the Sugar Industry, the 1897 Royal Commission on Land Settlement, the 1900 Royal Commission on Certain Proposed Railway Extensions and the 1931 Royal Commission on the Development of North

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[11] Geoffrey Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away,* A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1963, Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From the Dreaming to 1915,* St Lucia, 1982, *A History of Queensland From 1915 to the Early 1980s*, St Lucia, 1984.

[12] John M. Tanzer, An Investigation of New Settlement in the Sugar Industry as a result of Post-War Expansion, BEc(hons) thesis, James Cook University, 1979; Peter Griggs, Plantation to Small Farm: A historical geography of the Lower Burdekin Sugar Industry, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1989.

[13] William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative", *Journal of American History,* March, 1992, vol.78, no.4, pp.1374-1376.

[14] Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, Oxford, 1979, pp.6-7.

Queensland (Land Settlement and Forestry), and in four newspapers, *The North Queensland Register, The Townsville Daily Bulletin,* the *Johnstone River Advocate* and its successor the *Evening Advocate,* of Innisfail, and *The Home Hill Observer,* covering the 1920s to 1960s. I also interviewed 14 mostly retired farmers, from Tully to Ayr, corresponded with nature conservationists Len Webb and Billie Gill, both formerly of the Far North, and interviewed botanist Betsy Jacques and retired fisherman Keith Bryson, of Townsville.

I was influenced by the availability of source material in my choice of nature conservationists, Edmund Banfield, Hugo Flecker, John Busst and Len Webb. Banfield wrote about nature in three books and many newspaper articles and also was a witness in the 1889 sugar Royal Commission. Flecker wrote for the Cairns' Naturalists newsletter and some his letters to novelist Jean Devanny are held in the JCU library archive. John's Busst's letters and papers from his campaigns of the 1960s are in the JCU archive too, including correspondence with Len Webb. Webb's views can also be found in his books and articles.

My North Queensland intrudes into the region usually regarded as the Far North, and excludes Mackay. It runs from Bowen to Cairns, along 550km of coastal plains, through 10 sugar mill districts, and on to the Atherton Tableland. The boundaries are rather arbitrary, having been based on availability of source material, but encompass a distinctly tropical North region. The four individuals whom I have chosen to examine as nature conservation activists had strong interests in this region. The period of my study, 1861-1970, covers roughly five generations of European land use, culminating in the complete mechanisation of cane growing and harvesting and the advent of conservationism as a powerful political force.

Farmers in the sugar districts from Bowen to the Johnstone River expanded cane plantings tenfold from 23,817ac (9526ha) to 258,895ac (103,438ha) between 1901 and 1970.[15] The proportion of people working in agriculture in the region's four major sugar cane-growing shires, Ayr, Cardwell, Johnstone and Hinchinbrook, fell from 50 per cent to 40 per cent between 1933 and 1971, while the population of these areas increased by 33 per cent from 39,445 in 1933, to 52,440 in 1971. Nearly 2000 suppliers in mill areas from Home Hill to Innisfail produced 1.8 million tonnes of cane in 1940, when average farm size was 74ac (30ha). Thirty years later, 2737 suppliers produced 18.5 million tonnes from farms with an average size of 90ac (36ha). About 35 per cent of the Atherton Tableland's 493 dairy farms disappeared while producers lifted output from 5.2 million gallons to 8.8 million gallons between 1929 and 1970.[16]

The residents of Cairns and Townsville and smaller centres reshaped their surroundings at least as profoundly as the farmers. Each settlement transplanted vegetation and architecture from around the world. Dry tropics settlements such as Bowen and Townsville seemed to have shared the farmers' faith in Providence and science for replenishment of often scarce groundwater. The question of securing a permanent water supply was a recurring issue for civic authorities. Despite the rhetoric of closer-settlement, the cities grew faster than surrounding rural areas, as Townsville's population increased from 25,876 in 1933, to 71,265, in 1971 and Cairns's from 11,993 to 30,226. Urban growth entailed decisions on conservation of resources such as water and vegetation as residents recreated manageable vistas in city parks and gardens and their own backyards.

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[15] *Queensland Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings,* 1901, Department of Agriculture annual report, p.29 (p.237); *The Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol 31, 1972, production statistics from Innisfail, Herbert and Burdekin districts.

[16] *Queensland Legislative Assembly Parliamentary Papers,* 1930, vol.2, Agricultural Production 1929, p.201 (p.871); *Statistics of the State of Queensland,* 1970-71.

Historiography

Historians of North Queensland have not generally looked for a "conservation ethic"[17] among farmers. Fitzgerald, in particular, presented soil and water erosion and indiscriminate clearing as evidence of the farmers' lack of any ethical qualms about the destruction of nature. He argued in the first volume of his history, published in 1984, that the settlers' optimistic faith in material progress had blinded them to environmental and climatic hazards, especially in the tropics.[18] J.M. Powell wrote in 1991 that the State's natural environment had taken a "fearful hiding" during the era of mainly Labor governments from 1915 to 1957: "the forests and scrubs were remorselessly cleared of timber and farmland and native fauna received short shrift from governments, graziers and farmers".[19] This reading of Queensland farming history has been repeated most recently by James and Margarita Bowen.[20] Fitzgerald and the Bowens depict the farmers as ignorant and destructive, incapable of regret over their destruction of a previously pristine world. William Lines supports this view in his elegy to an Australia uncontaminated by capitalism, with the tree stump as a symbol of nature subdued:

> The bush, like the wildlife and Aborigines sheltering within, stood in the way, not only of order and light, but of progress. The stump represented victory[21]:

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[17] Martin Mulligan and Stuart Hill, *Ecological Pioneers, A Social History of Australian Ecological Thought and Action*, Cambridge, 2001, pp.136-163, devote a chapter to the development of a "conservation ethic" in Australia, beginning with "patchy efforts to halt the degradation of Australia's unique and fragile biodiversity".

[18] Ross Fitzgerald, *From the Dreaming to 1915, Queensland University Press,* Brisbane, 1982, p.335.

[19] J.M. Powell, *Plains of Promise, Rivers of Destiny,* Bowen Hills 1991, p.86.

[20] Bowen, Great Barrier Reef, p.293: "Always the most culturally backward state in Australia, Queensland had the lowest levels of general education … The overwhelming drive was to clear the land for agriculture, a major consequence being the destruction of forests and the extermination of wildlife. The Labor Party, which held office for most of the interwar years, with its ideology of agrarian socialism for the common farmer, had little interest in conservation."

[21] William Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, Sydney, 1991, p.41.

Simon Schama identifies nostalgia for an idealised past as central to environmental history. He wrote in 1995 that all such history "tells the same dismal tale" of traditional cultures which once lived in a state of sacred reverence with the soil being toppled by capitalist aggressors who treat the Earth as "a machine that would never break, however hard it was used or abused".[22] My study is not intended to be an elegy. It is an attempt to understand the philosophical basis for settlement and subsequent development of a tropical region regarded in the nineteenth century as tantalisingly rich but no place for Europeans. My search for "contradictory values" has been informed by reflections on the work of US environmental historians William Cronon and Donald Worster. Cronon argued in 1990 that the "oft-repeated story" of capitalism ruining soils, habitats, human communities and ecosystems, tends to limit the quest of environmental history to define the role and place of nature in human life.[23]

A public discourse about the fragility of nature and destructiveness of humans can be found almost from the arrival of Europeans in the North. George Elphingstone Dalrymple complained in 1874 of the destruction of magnificent, picturesque and shady trees on Fitzroy Island by beche-de-mer fishermen. These people were "despoilers" who must be prevented from spreading their "ruthless destruction" along the coast, he wrote in his journal.[24] Dalrymple probably cultivated his romantic sensibility while managing coffee plantations in Ceylon before migrating to New South Wales. His Eden existed in green luxuriance. The scattered, flat-topped ranges that he found inland of the Endeavour River, with "not a single, attractive feature" seemed to him "monuments of the ruin wrought by degradation and abrasion", from

[22] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* London, 1995, p.13.
[23] William Cronon, "Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History", *Journal of American History,* vol 76, No. 4, March, 1990, p.1130.
[24] *QLA V&P,* 1874, G.E. Dalrymple, "Narrative of Exploration of the North-East Coast of Queensland", p.16.

what he imagined had once been a primeval sandy plain.[25] Francis Ratcliffe lamented the ubiquitous "thin veil" of smoke from cleared timber and cane trash which he found over the Atherton Tableland during his survey of flying foxes in 1930. He regretted the sacrifice of forests for fruit trees, corn and grazing pastures. While most clearing had been desirable and necessary, some seemed to him to have been rash and short-sighted, at the cost of valuable trees and fauna. Poorly understood species were being destroyed to make room for problematic dairy farms dependent on a guaranteed home price for butter:

> Although I know it was ridiculous, I always felt a twinge of regret and anger on seeing the fine forest go down before the axe and fire-stick, sealing the fate of all the queer creatures it harboured. Australians revel in felling trees.[26]

Frank Dalby Davison and Brooke Nicholls used similar language in *Blue Coast Caravan,* 1935, with references to jungle-clad hillsides around Cairns having been "untouched by the axe", and to the use of fire as another means of "tree-murdering".[27] Novelist Jean Devanny joined the discourse in parts of her book, *Bird of Paradise*, in 1945, describing encounters with North Queenslanders on the home front during World War II. She found a cane-farming couple near Cairns who blamed the disappearance of native animals and birds on "Italians" who "shot everything on the wing and everything on the ground".[28] Devanny, a member of the North Queensland Naturalists Club, also introduced an unnamed botanist who condemned the "wasting" of country around Charters Towers through the "planless felling of the forests".[29] The discourse continued through the 1950s, for example in the Innisfail

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[25] *Ibid.,* p.21.
[26] Francis Ratcliffe, *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand*, Sydney, 1963 (first published Great Britain 1938), pp.63-67.
[27] Frank Dalby Davison, Brooke Nicholls, *Blue Coast Caravan,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1935, p. 204-205.
[28] Jean Devanny, *Bird of Paradise,* Sydney, 1945, p.54.
[29] *Ibid.,* p.133.

Evening Advocate's 1957 description of a remnant of jungle set aside for tourists as "the Tablelands as they were before the first pioneer struck a blow with his axe".[30] In the 1960s these asides on the cost of progress grew into a critique of human impact on nature in Australia, in books such as *The Great Extermination* (1966)[31], *The Last of Lands* (1969)[32] and *Environmental Boomerang* (1973)[33]. Alfred Crosby analysed America and Australia as "neo-Europes" facing widespread erosion, diminishing fertility and finite profits in *Ecological Imperialism* (1986),[34] Lines' book appeared in 1991 and Tim Flannery examined degradation of marginal land in *The Future Eaters* (1994)[35].

Geoffrey Bolton examined the history of the nature conservation movement in *Spoils and Spoilers*, published in 1981, during conflict in Australia between what he described as environmental lobbies and the development-hungry frontier states of Queensland and Western Australia. Bolton found that an influential minority of nature lovers had begun campaigning in the 1880s for preservation of some parts of the "bush", representing the Australian landscape in its European pre-settlement condition. Their suggestion that the bush could have an aesthetic or spiritual value conflicted with the mainstream view in rural areas of its menacing vastness which needed to be tamed and transformed:

> This attraction for the bush was an acknowledgement, if only indirectly, that the everyday environment in which urban Australians lived and worked left something to be desired.[36]

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[30] *Evening Advocate,* Innisfail, 9 September, 1957.
[31] A.J. Marshall (ed.) *The Great Extermination,* London, 1966.
[32] L.J. Webb, D. Whitelock, J. Le Gay Brereton, *The Last of Lands,* Jacaranda Press, Milton, Qld, 1969.
[33] L.J. Webb, *Environmental Boomerang,* Brisbane, 1973.
[34] Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, Cambridge, 1986.
[35] Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters,* Melbourne, 1994.
[36] Geoffrey Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers,* Sydney, 1981, p.107, p.169.

Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, writing in *A History of the Australian Environmental Movement* (1991) placed "nature lovers" in a first wave of conservationists whom they said had advocated and practised wise use of natural resources between the late nineteenth century and 1950s. This movement, led by scientists, professionally trained resource managers and bushwalkers, was succeeded in the 1950s and 60s by a second wave of students and professionals radicalised by concerns about chemical pollution of the air, water and food chain, highlighted by Rachel Carson in 1962.[37] Activists campaigned to limit use of natural resources and generation of wastes and were prepared to attack governments for neglecting the public good. [38] They were part of the international environmental movement, "concerned about resource depletion and pollution on a global scale",[39] and "contradictions between global economic growth and environmental degradation".[40] Hutton and Connors argued that environmentalists, distinct from conservationists, feared that human beings had corrupted the life-sustaining web of interconnections between living organisms and saw an urgent need to make amends. They were stewards of the Earth's "ecology', the term first used by Ernst Haeckel in 1866 to describe the branch of biology dealing with interrelationships between organisms and their environment.[41] Charles Darwin had examined the complex interdependence of

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[37] Hutton and Connors p.22; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring,* Harmondsworth, England, 1965. p.24 (first published in America by Houghton Miffin, 1962). Carson alerted readers around the world to the dangers of the pesticide DDT and the escalating "war against nature". US plant physiologist Barry Commoner discussed concerns similar to Carson's about pesticides, phosphates and pollution from the mid-1950s. Jeffrey C. Ellis, `On the Search for a Root Cause', in W. Cronin, *Uncommon Ground,* New York, 1995, discusses Commoner's "environmental alarms".

[38] Hutton and Connors, p. 90, p.265.

[39] *Ibid.,* p.91, p.125. Hutton and Connors say activists of the 1960s regarded "conservation" and "preservation" as inadequate concepts when dealing with resource depletion and pollution on a global scale and identified themselves as environmentalists.

[40] *Ibid.,* p.2.

[41] *Ibid.,* p.9, Hutton and Connors see concern with the "abstract notion of ecology" as a characteristic of "second-wave" environmentalists; Ernst Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen,* Berlin, 1866, I, p.8, II, pp. 253-256, 286-287, cited by Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy, A History of Ecological Ideas,* Cambridge, second ed., 1994, p.192.

plants and animals in *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859. He wrote of a "tangled bank" of different yet dependent organisms, sharing life "originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one".[42] Lutheran clergyman and naturalist John Bruckner described nature in 1768 as "one continued web of life", which defied rational views of order and economy.[43]

Libby Robin argued in 1998 that the pre-World War II conservationists and "urban environmentalists" of the 1970s had used differing constructions of nature and custodianship of nature. Her natural history society members of the 1930s exercised advocacy for nature writ small, for example in a favourite camping spot. In contrast, environmentalists defended a nature they did not know, or need to know, directly. They campaigned out of concern for nature as a human habitat in danger of destruction, while pre-war conservationists fought to protect their intimacy with a construction of nature as a passive resource for human refreshment, not "for nature itself".[44]

Rainforest ecologist Len Webb, who began campaigning in the 1960s for protection of North Queensland's rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef, saw the appendage of an "ism" to his passion for nature conservation as an unhelpful "journalistic spin".[45] He wrote in 1973 that human consciousness had changed when US astronauts presented a picture of the earth as seen from the moon, as a "very small and very lonely planet in space". Through this new consciousness, humans had became aware that they, not providence, were responsible for the future of a world with finite resources: "If we define man as the only animal who is conscious of his

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[42] Charles Darwin, *The Illustrated Origin of Species,* abridged and introduced by Richard E. Leakey, New York, 1979, p.223. (first published London, 1859).
[43] John Bruckner, *A Philosophical Survey of Animal Creations, Part 1,* London, 1768, section 1, pp.34, 50, 76. 77, 133, cited by Donald Worster, Nature's Economy, p.47.
[44] Robin, Little Desert, p.140.
[45] Personal correspondence Len Webb to Ian Frazer, 27 July, 2001.

relationship with the rest of the world … he cannot escape some idea of responsibility towards the rest of nature and for future generations".[46]

The anxieties of twentieth century environmentalists can be seen as part of a long tradition of thought about humans and nature, dating back to Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, who speculated on human influence on climate in the third century BC.[47] Thomas Malthus warned in the 1806 edition of his *Essay on the Principle of Population,* that the capacity of the earth to provide for mankind was "not unlimited", regardless of the labour and ingenuity of farmers. Not even "proper management" could keep pace with an unrestricted increase in population, he wrote.[48] George Perkins Marsh wrote in 1864 that the balance of nature had been upset by felled forests and warned of squandering natural resources:

> But we are, even now, breaking up the floor and wainscoting and doors and window frames of our dwelling, for fuel to warm our bodies and seethe our pottage, and the world cannot afford to wait till the slow and sure progress of exact science has taught it a better economy.[49]

Aldo Leopold, a commentator on the post- World War II conservation movement in the United States, identified the movement's ethical dimension as the willingness to assert as individual thinkers had since the days of Isaiah that despoliation of the land was wrong.[50]

However, by the early 1970s, self-appointed guardians of nature were under scrutiny by political opponents and some iconoclastic writers. Australian George Seddon suggested in 1972 that the rhetoric of the environmental protest movement

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[46] Leonard J. Webb, *Environmental Boomerang,* The Jackaranda Press, Milton, Qld, 1973, p.1, p.81, p.96.
[47] Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore,* Cambridge, 1967, pp.129-130.
[48] T.R. Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population,* 1806, Cambridge, 1992 edition, ed Donald Winch, pp.340-341.
[49] George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature,* 1864 (1965 ed), p.52.
[50] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac,* London, 1949, pp.202-203, cited by Gorge Seddon, *Landprints,* pp.196-197.

had already become counter-productive because it tended to exploit fear, guilt, self-righteousness and hate:

> Western society has, historically, been self-reforming in a degree unmatched by any other, and it is not dead yet. It is counter-productive to destroy the faith of the young in their own society. Extreme rhetoric is socially divisive, and it is sure to provoke ecological backlash. It debases the quality of public debate. For all these reasons it should be eschewed.[51]

Seddon was sceptical of arguments against despoliation of the land, based on the land's own mystical rights. He agreed that exhausting the land was wrong, not because of the land's "rights" but because such wasteful behaviour infringed the rights of future generations. Farmers had taken a "custodial" view and conserved the agrarian resources of Europe for centuries. "The custodial view is weakest in newly settled lands, and needs all the encouragement we can give it through legal and tax support," he argued.[52]

Beyond the campaigns to save North Queensland's rainforests and Great Barrier Reef, which I will discuss in Chapter Five, a separate public discourse ran through the twentieth century, opposing development in tropical Australia on the grounds of its unsuitablity for white settlement.

In a prize-winning essay in 1918, geographer Griffith Taylor argued against intensive white settlement of the tropics. He likened Townsville's climate to Calcutta's and asserted that the south-east of the continent was better suited to sustaining large population densities.[53] He restated his case during the next 40 years, that the inhabitants of Australia's northern coastal settlements should take "unusual

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[51] George Seddon, *Landprints – Reflections on Place and Landscape*, Cambridge, 1997, pp.197-198. Extract first published as "The Rhetoric and Ethics of the Environmental Protest Movement", *Meanjin*, December, 1972.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Griffith Taylor, "Geographical Factors Controlling the Settlement of Tropical Australia", *Queensland Geographical Journal Proceedings,* 32nd, 33rd sessions, 1918, pp. 3, 38, 55.

care with their health, diet, housing, methods of exercise, hours of work etc." However, he conceded that the growing population of Queensland's sugar coast was a special case, in an "unusually well-endowed portion of Australia's tropics".[54] In 1965, economist Bruce Davidson challenged the viability of tropical agriculture, including sugar-growing, which he said was one of the most highly subsidised industries in Australia. Writing in *The Northern Myth,* he said labour-intensive tropical crops appeared impossible unless subsidised. He rejected northern settlement as an aid to defence, arguing that military planners had been prepared to sacrifice the North in World War II,[55] and opposed the Mareeba-Dimbulah and Burdekin irrigation schemes on economic grounds.[56] Geographer John Homes observed in 1994 that marginal land in Northern Australia was becoming recognised as better suited to "amenity-orientated uses" than production of commodities, such as beef. He defined "amenity values" as those directly contributing to non-material wants, needs and aspirations, such as recognition of Aboriginal land rights, preservation of wilderness, recreation and tourism, all modes for "consumption" of the countryside.[57]

Constructions of nature, the North, rainforests and the Reef

Constructions of nature excluding and including human beings co-existed through most of the period of my study. Peter Raby writes that the collective experience of Europe's "scientific travellers" of the nineteen century, including Charles Darwin, was "a rediscovered sense of the natural world and of the

[54] Griffith Taylor, *Australia A Study of Warm Environments and the Effect on British Settlement,* London, seventh edition, 1959, pp.443-444.
[55] Bruce Davidson, *The Northern Myth, A Study of the Physical and Economic Limits to Agricultural and Pastoral Development in Tropical Australia,* Melbourne, 1965, pp.115-126.
[56] Bruce Davidson, *Australia Wet or Dry?,* Melbourne, 1969, pp.225-226.
[57] John Holmes, "From Commodity Values Towards Amenity Values in the Northern Frontier", *Australian Cultural History,* 1994, pp. 97-98.

interdependence of all forms of life"[58] However, explorers and journalists who wrote about the cornucopia of nature in North Queensland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries usually presented it as a thriving, beautiful and slightly menacing, presence – inspiring scenery and a rich natural resource. Journalist and farmer Edmund Banfield, of Dunk Island, saw nature in the North as a force to "draw near to" for solace and instruction, but also as an artefact, a remnant of the Garden of Eden to be rendered orderly and predictable.[59] *The Townsville Herald*, in 1891, worried about the prospects of settlers in the Cardwell district struggling to sell produce in a district "to which nature is profusely liberal" and facing the inevitability of the return of the jungle, "completely obliterating all traces" of their presence.[60]

Nineteenth century explorers such as George Dalrymple and Archibald Meston presented nature as the exotic backdrop to their journeying. In 1873, Dalrymple likened the luxuriance and beauty of Johnstone River valley to the alluvial valleys of India, the Malayan Archipelago or South America, while acknowledging that the jungle clothed half-a-million acres of unsurpassed soil well fitted for tropical agriculture.[61] Turtles swam past by like an armada of ironclad war ships[62] and the rapids at the head of the Moresby River ran over the shingly bed "like a Scotch trout stream".[63] He regarded the native people of the coast as enmeshed with nature, a furtive, unpredictable presence manifest in smoke curling from tree tops, deserted gunyahs and bora grounds, native wells, and distant figures in canoes. They were projections from a book of ripping tales, whom Dalrymple imagined indulging in

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[58] Peter Raby, *Bright Paradise, Victorian Scientific Travellers,* London, 1997, p. 251.
[59] E.J. Banfield, *The Confessions of a Beachcomber,* 1968 edition [first published 1908], p. xvi, p. 26.
[60] *The Townsville Herald,* January 10, 1891.
[61] Dalrymple, North Coast Expedition, pp.11-12.
[62] *Ibid.,* pp.15-16.
[63] *Ibid.,* p.12.

"incredibly wild and picturesque" corroborees, by the "ruddy glow" of their camp fires.[64]

Archibald Meston, journalist, explorer and later director of the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau in Sydney, emphasised the antiquity of the vista from Mount Bellenden-Ker, in 1895. He saw the mountain as "the Ararat of the Pacific". The green mosaic of land and ocean had "lain there unaltered since Chaos and the Earthquake painted it in smoke and flame and terror in the dark morning of the world!"[65] A correspondent to *The Townsville Herald* used a similar perspective when describing the landscape at the mouth of the Herbert River in 1889. Voyaging from Dungeness to a land sale at Cordelia, the writer found a "new sketch" at every bend of the river which, if not quite as romantic as the scenery of the Rhine or Nile valleys "should be an object of pride to all North Queenslanders". The writer, like Dalrymple, simultaneously saw breathtaking scenery and potential for exploitation of useful timber and rich soil. Tropical trees festooned in beautiful creepers gave way along the river bank to "exuberant crops of sugar, corn and other produce [which] testify to the richness of the soil".[66]

Hikers, hunters, fossickers, fishermen and farmers penetrated beyond the scenery of the North from the late 19th century. They began a new discourse of reverence for nature which acknowledged reliance on its provision and an awe of its complexity. Ion Idriess praised the co-existence with nature achieved by Aboriginal people in the ranges at the back of Cairns in his book *Men of the Jungle*, published in 1932. He extended his admiration to George Stewart, a "hatter" of Mount Molloy, who he said had a capacity for companionship with animals and birds and was a lover of everything in nature. Idriess foreshadowed Len Webb's ecological construction of

[64] *Ibid.,* p.13.
[65] Archibald Meston, *Geographic History of Queensland,* Brisbane, 1895, pp.211-212.
[66] *The Townsville Herald,* 2 February, 1889.

the rainforest with his description of the deceptively peaceful "primeval northern Queensland jungle-scrub" which teemed with life of "a million trees, a million vines, under a canopy of leaves blocking every ray of sunlight". A reviewer, writing in *The North Queensland Register,* recommended the book for its analysis of "man and Nature", and for presenting the diversity and beauty of Australia to the outside world.[67]

Respect for nature and admiration for settlers who had learned to know and use it can be found in the *Register* in the early 1930s. Journalist Alexander Vennard praised the "typical Australian boy", at home more with nature than with tramping city streets, "who sees much but is little seen".[68] He encouraged young readers to respect the provision of Mother Nature by resisting the temptation to pick wildflowers but instead let them seed and bloom another year.[69] George Barrymore, a colleague of Edmund Banfield's, celebrated the intricacy of avian adaptation to the North's climate.[70] The reality of life in Queensland, a poet named A.R. Cleary of Danbulla, wrote in the *Register* in 1937 was that "nothing opposes nature and her efforts still remains".[71]

Meanwhile, the tourist trade endorsed the principle, expressed by Banfield in 1912 that the jungle was best sampled in miniature, to be understood, or loved. Banfield, who disliked the vast "silent wilderness" of North Queensland, recommended the microcosm of an island: "Small must be the Isle of Dreams, so

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[67] Ion L. Idriess, *Men of the Jungle,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p.1; *N.Q. Register,* 8 October, 1932, review by Freda Barrymore.
[68] *N.Q. Register,* 20 June, 1931, Children's Corner, "A typical Australian boy's eyes are keen and see many things that others do not. He sees tracks and signs which reveal to him the nature and habits of the creatures that made them. He knows how to stalk animals and study them in their natural haunts. He sees much, but is little seen.".
[69] *Ibid.,* 22 November, 1930, "Children's Corner".
[70] *Ibid.,* 27 August, 1932, "Out Our Way".
[71] *Ibid.,* 6 August, 1937, "On The Track".

small that possession is possible … because since it is yours it becomes a duty to exhaustively comprehend it."[72]

Jose Paronella, a former Catalonian canecutter, offered visitors an alternative to the vastness of the North's vistas by building a Spanish castle and pleasure grounds at Mena Creek, near Innisfail, between 1932 and 1935. He planted several thousand native trees with advice from Forestry Department and obtained 50 varieties of maidenhair fern from Botanical Gardens. He is said to have considered the site, beside the Mena Creek falls, "the most beautiful place on Earth", and to have based the design on Spanish pleasure parks, on the Moorish principle that "Nature should never be overridden by man's creations".[73]

Entrepreneurs such as the Hayles Family and Edward Armand, of Magnetic Island, Hugo Brassey on Dunk Island,[74] the English family with their "Jungle" at Malanda,[75] and St John Robinson, of Townsville[76], presented their own microcosms of Nature: transplanted koalas on Magnetic Island,[77] "alligators" at Robinson's Townsville zoo,[78] distillations of a tropical paradise, reportedly without mosquitoes at Arcadia.[79] In 1966, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* welcomed a proposal by Rowes Bay Country Club to turn part of the Town Common into a golf course, because the "scenic attraction" of the nature reserve was in decline and golf courses, without

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[72] E. J. Banfield, *My Tropic Isle,* London, second edition, 1912, p.28.
[73] Dena Leighton, *The Spanish Dreamer, A Biography of Jose Paronella,* Wollongong, 1997, pp.37, 63-64.
[74] Edward Armand established the Arcadia resort, "in the style of a native South Sea Island village", about 1889. Brothers Charles and Frank Hayles bought it in 1919 (*T.D.Bulletin,* 21 January, 1931); Mr and Mrs Hugo Brassey had by 1936 built nine concrete cottages in their "paradise" on Dunk I (*The Johnstone River Advocate,* 18 February, 1936).
[75] *Evening Advocate,* Innisfail, 9 September, 1957; *The Queensland Naturalist,* February, 1937, p.21.The 25ac sample of jungle, praised by Hugo Flecker, of the N.Q. Naturalists' Club for preserving bush flora, appears to have closed in 1939.
[76] *Devanny,* Bird of Paradise, pp.108-117.
[77] *T.D.Bulletin,* 6 Septemeber, 1967, reported the koalas were introduced to the island by ferry and resort operator Frank Hayles, "about 60 years ago".
[78] *N.Q. Register,* 19 November, 1938, Ethel Joseph, "Townsville's Miniature Zoo".
[79] *T.D. Bulletin*, 21 January, 1931, O.E.J. Bartlett, `Townsville Tourist Attractions'. Notes the beach at Alma Bay is "free from either vermin or mosquitoes"

exception, added beauty to their surroundings. Keith Kennedy, president of the Townsville and District Natural History Society, opposed the golf course plan, and suggested his own artificial landscape, a "palm jungle", which he predicted would appeal more to tourists than a golf course. "Tourists would rather see the brolgas dancing than grown men indulging in the childish pastime of hitting balls about," he wrote in the club's magazine.[80]

The Great Barrier Reef, which according to a contributor to the Australian Geographical Society's *Walkabout* magazine in 1959 was as "remote as the other side of the world" for most Australians, existed for many as an idea of perfection in nature.[81] The Reef was an amalgam of images beginning with William Saville-Kent's hand-coloured and monochrome photographs in *The Great Barrier Reef of Australia* (1893) and *The Naturalist in Australia* (1897), which introduced British readers to the beauty of coral flats at low tide.[82] Although mostly invisible before the advent of cheap, lightweight scuba and snorkelling equipment, The Reef was revered by the 1930s as one of the "wonders of the world"[83], or "not one, but a host of wonders, a natural treasury whose riches are inexhaustible".[84] Reports of a survey of the Low Isles by a team of British scientists in 1929 had alerted readers to the beauty of coral off Cairns. University of Melbourne zoology lecturer Dr Gwynneth Buchanan, who spent a fortnight with the scientists, later told readers of the *Melbourne Argus* and *The North Queensland Register* of a sensual world, where women worked in shorts, shirts and Yokohama boots. She described Pixie Cay as "lovelier than the loveliest garden,

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[80] *T.D. Bulletin,* 21 November, 1966, "Enhancing The Town Common"; *The Townsville Naturalist,* vol 5, No. 6, November, 1966 and vol 5, No. 7. February 1967.
[81] Ian Pedlow, "Into Reef Waters", *Walkabout,* June, 1959, p.36
[82] William Saville-Kent, *The Great Barrier Reef of Australia, Its Products and Potentialities* London, W.H. Allen, 1893; W. Saville-Kent, *The Naturalist in Australia,* London, Chapman and Hall, 1897.
[83] *T.D.Bulletin,* 22 January 1931, O.E.J. Bartlett, "Attracting the Tourist".
[84] Charles Bartlett, *Tropical Australia,* p.3.

with every colour, rich and delicate, one could think of".[85] Naturalists' expeditions and more books followed, such as *Wonders of the Great Barrier Reef*, by Theo Roughley, first published in 1936 and reprinted eight times up to 1947, *Great Barrier Reef* by marine scientist William Dakin (1950), and *The Romance of the Great Barrier Reef*, by Alexander Vennard, published posthumously under the pen name Frank Reid (1954).[86] Green Island documentary film makers Noel and Kitty Monkman unsuccessfully sought government action to protect reef flats from being trampled by tourists at low tide, in the pre-snorkling era.[87]

In 1954, Cairns businessmen Lloyd Grigg and Vince Vlassoff condensed the reef for tourists into a collection of corals and clams relocated from the Outer Reef to outside the windows of their underwater observatory at Green Island. The 70 ton viewing chamber offered visitors "a unique peep into Nature's wonderland", revealing animals engaged in "the grim struggle for existence which has continued through the ages".[88]

By the 1960s, in the shorthand of advertising, the reef's connotations included "islands in a tropical paradise",[89] "the world's bluest waters"[90] , "artistry beyond belief",[91] and "one of the seven wonders of the world."[92] *Walkabout* magazine used the silhouette of a palm tree on the cover of its June 1959 issue to symbolise the

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[85] *North Queensland Register,* July 13, 1929, p.59, from *Melbourne Argus;* Kay Saunders, "Buchanan, Florence Griffiths", in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol.7: 1891-1939., Melbourne, 1979, pp.471-72.
[86] Cited by J. Bowen, "The Great Barrier Reef', in S.Dovers (ed.), *Australian Environmental History*, Melbourne, 1994, p.237.
[87] *Ibid.,* p.238.
[88]Bowen, Great Barrier Reef, p.324; *The Australian Sugar Yearbook,* 1957, p.264
[89] Queensland Government Tourist Bureau advertisement, "See Queensland First", in *The North Queensland Annual,* 1969.
[90] Advertisement for Orpheus Island Lodge, *The Australian Sugar Yearbook,* 1957, p.352.
[91] Poem on Green Island Underwater Observatory, by Percy Guy, *The North Queensland Annual,* 1969.
[92] Advertisement for Green Island, *The Australian Sugar Yearbook,* 1957, p.264.

reef.[93] *The North Queensland Annual*, a tourism magazine published in Brisbane in 1969, used colour photographs of coral, crabs, marine worms and sea urchins to represent the reef and pictures of tourists looking at coral through a glass-bottomed boat and a row of happy anglers to promote Green Island. In 1970, John Busst sent the Duke of Edinburgh *The Great Barrier Reef*, by Allan Power, in an attempt to enlist his support for the Save The Reef campaign. Busst trusted Power's book, with its excellent photography and accurate text, would show the Royal family "the inhabitants of the reef" better than views available at the Green Island Underwater Marine Observatory.[94]

The Townsville Daily Bulletin's case in 1967 for conservation of the reef assumed that readers had an ecological understanding of this "tourist attraction without parallel". Coral poachers, shell collectors and careless reef walkers were to blame for killing reefs which once teemed with "colourful and fascinating inhabitants":

> Every time a person turns over a boulder on a coral reef – and leaves it upturned – he reverses the life conditions for the algal growths which, living on the top of the boulder, depend on sunlight and food for their processes; and the delicate, highly coloured forms of life which, existing on the underside of the boulder, cannot stand bright sunlight. All life forms on the boulder thus die. This in turn reduces the food available for the fascinating marine creatures which come up from the deeper water to feed.[95]

Presumably some readers who fished knew the waters of the Reef from experience. Vic McCristal, a Cardwell wildlife photographer, spear fisherman and founding

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[93] *Walkabout,* June, 1957, cover picture captioned "Sunset, Great Barrier Reef".
[94] John Busst to the Duke of Edinburgh, 1 April, 1970 (JBC/CORR/16 1968-70 Correspondence with Prime Minister's Department); The Duke, president of the World Wildlife Fund, visited the reef in 1970, but did not speak publicly on the campaign to ban oil exploration, Wright, pp. 152-153.
[95] *T.D. Bulletin,* 10 August, 1967.

member of the Australian National Sportsfishing Association, considered the reef one of the natural wonders of the world, as well as a "natural resource". He wrote to John Busst in 1968 that he was aware of the "magnitude of wildlife" - birds, marine mammals, corals and shellfish – that would be put at risk if the reef was damaged. His organisation believed the reef should be used with "sufficient care and wisdom," for future generations and was against uncontrolled access by other nationalities. The association, with its motto "sport, conservation and integrity" supported the Save The Reef campaign.[96]

Thesis structure

I have written a narrative of changing land use in the North in Chapters One and Two, followed in Chapters Three, Four and Five by an examination of how legislators, farmers and conservationists dealt with nature. Chapter One presents settlement as a state exercise in reclaiming an "unproductive wilderness"[97] and supplying world markets with sugar and butter. Farmers and successive governments struggled to understand the climate, soils and risks posed by insect pests, crop diseases, erosion and monocultures. Meteorologists, agronomists, geographers and tropical health researchers offered help to stretch natural resources. There were some dissenting voices. Some questioned the monoculture of the protected sugar industry on economic and ecological grounds. The sugar industry took pride in the increasing efficiency of farmers. The concept of "good stewardship" was not included in the industry's development discourse.

[96] Vic McCristal, Cardwell, to John Busst, 15 February, 1968; Vic McCristal to Kathleen McArthur, Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, 2 February, 1968 (JBC/CORR/18); *Coral Coast Calling* newspaper, 24 August, 2002, "Cardwell's Sporting Legend".
[97] QLA V&P, 1867, p.775, Petition on Pastoral Leases in the Northern Districts.

Chapter Two deals with the establishment of dairying on the Atherton Tableland, other cropping ventures and fishing. A develop-the-North, use-it-or-lose it discourse lasted into the 1960s, despite some dissent from geographer Griffith Taylor and economist Bruce Davidson.

Chapter Three outlines the State's generally lame attempts to protect native flora, fauna, scenic areas, fishery resources and the Great Barrier Reef. Protection laws were often flawed and poorly policed but debate over their introduction reveals utilitarian, nationalistic, ecological, aesthetic and ethical concerns. From 1870, the Queensland Acclimatisation Society argued for the establishment of a forestry department and a system to monitor clearing, citing ecological concerns about climate change.[98] The growth of tourism added a utilitarian motive to previous efforts to preserve beautiful and morally uplifting plants and scenery. Governments generally followed public opinion in their attempts at preservation, for example in the belated protection of koalas after the State-sanctioned slaughter of 500,000 of them in 1926. Residents of Townsville were obliged to use water carefully because of frequent dry spells and inadequate reserves. The town relied on underground water for its first 60 years. Scientific and dilettante tourists, as the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* described them, began exploring parts of the Reef in the 1930s.[99]

Chapter Four examines farmers' attitudes, based on their statements in interviews, evidence to government inquiries, newspaper articles and books. They expressed values constantly in their farming practices, guided by constructions of pioneering, Australia and Nature. Some adopted a "tread-lightly", "use-wisely" approach to exploitation of natural resources for both utilitarian and other philosophical reasons. Successful farmers, as observed by Geoffrey Bolton, learned

[98] Lewis A. Bernays to A.H. Palmer, Colonial Secretary, 13 October, 1870, in *V&P*, 1875-76, vol 1, Forest Conservancy report p.3 (p.1209).
[99] *T.D. Bulletin,* 22 January, 1931, "Attracting the Tourist" by E.J. Bartlett.

how to husband their land while understanding the tropical soil and climate. They trusted in tradition, intuition, science and Providence. Beyond this there were restraints in the 1930s and 40s, during a period of low sugar prices and state-imposed limits on production. Farmers in the Herbert River district recycled cane trash as mulch until 1934 when authorities introduced mandatory burning as a health precaution after outbreaks of Weil's disease. Italians were recruited to work in the North from 1891, in part because they were regarded as a "scientific, horticultural and agricultural race", capable of becoming successful settlers. Chinese farmers prospered because of their experience in tropical agriculture and their labour-intensive methods in the decades before mechanisation of farming and the White Australian policy.

Chapter Five searches for common ground between the ideals of farmers and the ideals of nature conservationists and environmentalists. Edmund Banfield (1852-1921), Hugo Flecker (1884-1957), John Busst (1909-1971) and Len Webb (1920-) each raised awareness of the interdependency of humans and nature through their writings and political lobbying. Banfield defended the birdlife of Dunk Island and introduced his Australian and British readers to the natural history of the North and the art of living simply off the land. Flecker also defended endangered native flora and fauna, and saw himself as an educator through the North Queensland Naturalists Club. Busst and Webb, leaders of campaigns to protect the North's rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef, were driven by a sense of responsibility for nature. Busst, Webb and Judith Wright, their colleague in the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, were "environmentalists", in the sense of considering themselves active stewards of the Earth's ecology. Studying native flora and fauna led members of Cairns and Townsville naturalists' groups of the 1930s, 40s and 50s into public advocacy for nature conservation. Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland branches formed in

Innisfail and Townsville in 1966 and 1968 had wide concerns, such as protecting the North's rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef, but were still grounded in a hands-on knowledge of nature.

Conclusions

Geoffrey Bolton observed in 1963 that white settlement of the North had been made permanent by newcomers adapting to the environment, learning to "husband" their land and co-operating in planning its development.[100] This process included crop rotation, trash conservation, planting nitrogen-fixing cover crops, using artificial fertilisers and fallowing to sustain soil fertility. Farmers tried to repair the damage caused by their poor practices by combining with neighbours to form trusts to control river bank erosion and boards to manage water. Depressed world markets, particularly during the 1930s, curbed expansion of sugar and dairy farming into marginal areas. The Queensland government regulated cane production through an assignment system which forced growers to spell at least 25 per cent of their properties, and restricted establishment of new farms. In the 1920s and 30s, farmers in the North's closely settled mill districts experimented with fertilisers, new plant varieties and irrigation to maximise sugar content. They put aside cleared land for horses and cattle and saved some scrub. This changed after World War II, as Federal and State governments encouraged expansion. Farmers with increased cane assignments sold their horse teams and bought tractors as they looked for cost-savings on larger farms.[101]

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[100] Bolton, A Thousand Miles, p.viii: "The North offered great natural assets and unexpected climatic difficulties It was only when the newcomers had learned to adapt to the environment, husband their land and co-operate in its planning and development, that permanent white settlement in North Queensland was assured."

[101] Mario Cristaudo, Ingham, conversation with Ian Frazer, 12 November, 2003. He believed he was the last farmer in the district still using horses when he retired his team of eight in 1953.

The case for active stewardship of nature, advocated by Len Webb and Judith Wright was not new. English essayist Harold John (H.J.) Massingham argued in the 1930s that mere protection of rural scenery, lands and buildings of beauty or historic interest was not enough:

> Protection is not only a losing game but one which looks upon green England as an ornamental exhibit; a countryside cannot live as a museum of antiquities. Rehabilitation is the need …[102]

In 1969 Webb defined conservation as "care of the human habitat", not just preserving objects or things, but maintaining "naturally occurring" processes. The need for nature conservation could be seen in the impending end of the virgin land bonanza in Australia. The low fertility and aridity of much of the environment had limited exploitation of the land and harvesting the country's renewable resources had become a job for science and land husbandry. Webb hoped that tourist promoters would see profit in preserving Australian scenery. He predicted that Australians, lacking a heritage of ancient architecture, would take increasing national pride in "natural monuments" such as termite mounds, Ayers Rock, the tracks of the Overlanders and "the vivid garments of the wattles on the plains". His preface to *The Last of Lands,* a survey of conservation issues, began with the warning, "not another acre to be alienated, not another native habitat to be gutted, until we take stock". Human beings were responsible for husbandry of the land by working with the "naturally occurring" processes of nature, guided by the laws of ecology, rather than imposing irreversible changes.[103] Webb saw aesthetic arguments for conservation of both undisturbed and artificial landscapes. Countryside shaped by centuries of

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[102] H.J. Massingham, "Our Inheritance from the Past", in *Britain and the Beast*, London, 1938, p.8.

[103] L.J. Webb, Introduction to L.J.Webb, D. Whitelock, J. Le Gay Brereton (eds), *The Last of Lands,* Milton, Qld, 1969, pp.xi-xvi (Webb identifies himself as author in his bibliography of popular ecological publications).

settlement and careful husbandry could be regarded as beautiful and therefore worthy of preservation.[104] Writing seven years earlier, he argued that the "whole community" had a moral duty to support and practise conservation, "because we all stand to benefit or fail by the future use of the land".[105]

Judith Wright made a similar point, writing in *Quadrant* in 1968. She hoped the "scrappy and ill-financed" work of conservationists would grow into a new consciousness in which human beings saw themselves as part of nature, interdependent and subordinate to its laws. Humans, facing the possibility of total destruction, could take on a new obligation for the continued existence of Earth, and enter a "new kind of creative relationship with Nature".[106] However, this proved a difficult concept to sell. Campaigning to protect the rather amorphous symbol of The Reef was much easier. Journalist Barry Wain recognised this in his obituary for John Busst, in 1971 in which he predicted Busst would be remembered for his efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef, but not for attempting to preserve rainforests, a cause which had failed to attract the same publicity:

> To want to save the rain forests of northern Australia is to be dismissed as a crank in Queensland. Especially if you are a rat-race drop-out, existing hermit-like and content in the "wilds of the north"[107]

I have inferred from studying farming practices the existence of a commonsense, "use-wisely", "tread-lightly" ethos among canegrowers. Some farmers' stories also suggest that they were guided by aesthetic and ethical values in deciding limits to exploiting the land. I suggest that further, detailed study of one mill district would be valuable, given that my conclusions are based on a general survey,

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[104] L.J. Webb, *Environmental Boomerang,* Milton, Qld, 1973, pp.92-93.
[105] L.J. Webb, "The Rape of the Forests", in A.J. Marshall (ed), *The Great Extermination,* London, 1966, p.202.
[106] Judith Wright, "Conservation as a Concept", *Quadrant,* 1968, pp. 29-33.
[107] Barry Wain, "The Bingil Bay Bastard", *Nation*, 1 May, 1971.

with a relatively small sample of witnesses. Further work is also required to differentiate between the attitudes of early pioneers and pre and post-World War II farmers. There seems unsurprising evidence that farmers became better stewards as they learned to understand the environment. However, expansion and mechanisation pushed them on to marginal land and left less time for what a Burdekin farmer of the 1940s, Les Searle, called farming as a lifestyle. Inferring attitudes and ideas from statements and stories requires imagination but in the case of North Queensland's settlers my tentative conclusions provide at least a context for understanding the scars of erosion and wetlands choked with feral exotic grasses.

Chapter 1

Settlement with a sweetener

A group of North Queensland graziers petitioned the Legislative Assembly for rent relief on their leasehold land in 1867, arguing that they were risking their lives and property to reclaim an "unproductive wilderness" for the benefit of the Crown, as well as for their own profit. Describing themselves as mostly former Victorian colonists who had invested large sums in grazing, their plea was based on three years of adverse seasonal conditions, complicated by the presence of "savages".[1]

The graziers' civilising rationale was similar to the view of Queensland Governor Sir George Bowen, in 1860, that pioneers throughout north-eastern Australia were steadily pushing forward the "margin of Christianity and civilsation".[2] Nearly 2.5 million British emigrants settled in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa between 1853 and 1880. They were part of an exodus of 60 million European emigrants to the New World between 1840 and 1940.[3]

The case for settling the wilderness as a patriotic duty can be found in the report and evidence of the 1931 Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland. John Frederick Currie, a land and commission agent, of Atherton, advocated the immediate opening of 160ac to 200ac blocks in the Palmerston district adjoining Millaa Millaa, "for the prosperity, wealth and defence of North

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[1] *QLA V&P,* 1867, p.775, "Pastoral Leases in the Northern Districts" (petition).
[2] George Bowen to the Duke of Newcastle, 4 December, 1860, in Stanley Lane-Poole (ed.), *Thirty Years of Colonial Government: A Selection from Despatches and Letters of Sir George Ferguson Bowen,* vol.1, Longmans Given and Co, London, 1889, p.193.
[3] David Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century,* Harmondsworth, 1950, p.164; David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon,* Harmondsowrth, 1967, p. 493; A. Bullock, O. Stallybrass, S. Trombley (eds) *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, London, 1988, p. 410.

Queensland".[4] The commission provided a forum for advocates of the expansion of what the commissioners described as the "largely vacant" North.[5] It was also a platform for the chairman of the Provisional Forestry Board, Harold Swain, to describe the existing process of settlement as a "forest disaster of first magnitude", which could only be worsened by further releases of Crown land.[6] The commissioners saw resolution of the conflict between the claims of settlers and the claims of forestry administrators as a key to prosperity. The Provisional Forestry Board's attempted curb on development was an "urgent national problem"[7] and a test of the White Australia policy:

> Probably it is true, as often stated, that the ultimate safety and fate of Australia largely depends on the development of the tropical North. North Queensland is becoming the testing place of our race.[8]

In 1931, James Bennett, who described himself as a "cocky" and veteran of Gallipoli and France, wrote to the *North Queensland Register* criticising the commissioners for not going far enough in unlocking the forested lands of the Far North. Unless several million people settled the empty spaces of the North there would be no margin of safety from invasion. Governments would have to do more to improve communication and transport links with the North. "If not, give it straight from the shoulder and let someone else take it over," he declared. [9]

In 1930, Evelyn Claire Swan, vice-president of the Northern Division of the Country Women's Association, used a similar argument in support of continued protection for the sugar industry. Her members at El Arish and Tully worked on their

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[4] *N.Q. Register,* 20 June, 1930, Commission at Atherton, p.30
[5] *QPP*, 1931, Vol II, The Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland (Land Settlement and Forestry), p.8 (p.262)
[6] *Ibid.,* p.8 (p.262).
[7] *Ibid.,* p.9 (p.262)
[8] *Ibid.,* p. 5 (p.259). Paragraph 1, quoted from extracts from public statements made by the commission before beginning to take evidence.
[9] *N.Q.Register,* 12 December, 1931.

family farms and endured seas of mud, lack of adequate medical attention and lack of domestic help out of a "spirit of adventure", she told the Townsville sittings of a Commonwealth committee of inquiry into the sugar industry. They were loyal to the White Australia policy and believed they were helping to guard the coast against foreign invasion. "Only by making use of our land can we hope to hold it against penetration, peaceful or otherwise, of foreigners," she said.[10]

In this chapter I will sketch the sugar industry from Home Hill to Innisfail, from 1861 to 1970, looking at farmers in their role as agents of the State in occupying and improving the land. I will examine how colonial, state and commonwealth governments tried to realise the ideology of closer-settlement. Farmers and successive governments alike struggled to understand the climate, soils and risks posed by insect pests, crop diseases, erosion and monocultures. Scientists – meteorologists, agronomists, animal husbandry experts, geographers and tropical health researchers – offered piecemeal advice on how to maximise the use of natural resources. Some, such as forester Harold Swain, also identified what they saw as non-negotiable limits to development. Swain saw the greatest restraint as the over-production of tropical crops around the world by "cheap, coloured labour". Despite the protection which Swain said had cost Australian consumers of sugar and dairy products 2.7 million pounds in 1930, the region was heavily in debt, with serious arrears in land rents, shire rates and repayment of developmental loans. He asserted that the "forest-made" fertility of cleared land was in decline, reflected in reduced cereal crop yields. However, the commissioners did not accept his remedy of developing a cabinetwood industry as an escape from the inevitable victory of cheap labour in other agricultural

[10] *T.D. Bulletin*, 4 November, 1930, report of Townsville sittings of Committee of Inquiry Investigating the Position of Sugar In Australia.

pursuits.[11] They regarded Swain's views, particularly his statement that existing settlement was a forest disaster of the first magnitude, as "alien to the British instinct of colonisation."[12]

The rise of sugar cane

Europeans moved into the Bowen and Burdekin districts with cattle and sheep about 1860.[13] Tenders for pastoral runs in the 51,000 square miles (13.2 million ha) Kennedy district opened on January 1 1861, despite misgivings by the Chief Commissioner for Crown Lands, Augustus Charles Gregory, who believed that the land should have been surveyed first.[14] Gregory also disapproved of the government's choice as District Commissioner for Crown Lands, George Elphingstone Dalrymple, a Scot who had once managed coffee plantations in Ceylon. In 1859, Dalrymple had explored the headwaters of the Suttor, Belyando and Burdekin Rivers, west of the Leichhardt Range, as well as the Burdekin delta lands, for a syndicate of businessmen. However, he was not a qualified surveyor.[15] Gregory's prediction that inaccurately marked runs would lead to chaos in the Crown Lands Office came true.[16] Dalrymple had received 454 applications covering 31,504 square miles (8.1 million ha) and issued 144 licences by mid-1862.[17] Gregory introduced a new policy in 1862

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[11] Harold Swain Papers, Forestry Reports 1931-48, Cabinetwood Forests of North Queensland, as given in evidence before the Royal Commission on the Development of North Quensland, Mitchell Library [A3119], p.1.
[12] *QPP*, 1931, Vol II, The Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland (Land Settlement and Forestry), p.8 (p.262).
[13] The New South Wales Government opened the district for pastoral settlement in November, 1859, based on optimistic assessments by Ludwig Leichhardt in 1844-45, and later explorers. The executive council of the new colony of Queensland, established on December 10, 1859, postponed opening the district for a year.
[14] Jean Farnfield, *Frontiersman, A biography of George Elphingstone Dalrymple,* Melbourne, 1968, p.43
[15] *Ibid.,* pp. 14-16. the syndicate included squatters from the Darling Downs and capitalists from Sydney and Moreton Bay including merchant Robert Towns.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.,* p.38.

requiring commissioners to be professional surveyors to try to reduce delays in the processing of applications. He suspended Dalrymple.[18]

The government of the new colony began keeping an inventory, effectively a base-line of its resources, with the Statistical Register, established in 1861. Planners used these statistics as a yardstick for growth and prosperity. The Registrar-General expressed disappointment in his first report at the "little progress" in agriculture, because of labour and transport problems.[19] The State counted livestock, paddocks, crops, factories, mines, births, deaths and marriages to define the relationship between settlers and the land and to chart the settlers' success in populating the wilderness. Meteorological observations, established formally in 1869, helped to define climatic regions and enabled farmers and planners to look for patterns in the recurrence of droughts and floods. The Government Meteorological Observer, Edmund MacDonnell, emphasised the scientific value of weather reports in his second annual report in 1870. He announced that soil temperatures would be taken, in line with latest European practice, and results publicised. He received returns from more than 40 stations in 1870, and published them monthly in the Government Gazette. The stations included Townsville, Bowen, Ravenswood and Vale of Herbert.[20]

Not much regulation was actually imposed by Queensland's Act for Regulating the Occupation of Unoccupied Crown Lands in the Unsettled Districts, of 1860, the amended Act in 1864, or the Act which superseded them in 1868. The first Act gave squatters runs of 25 to100 square miles (6400ha to 25600ha) for 14 years, under leasehold title, at 10 shillings per square mile per annum, providing they had stocked at a rate of 25 sheep or five head of horses or cattle per square mile in the first

[18] Anne Allingham, "Pioneer Squatting in the Kennedy District", *Lectures on North Queensland History,* Second Series, James Cook University, 1975, pp.50-51; John Kerr, *Black Snow and Liquid Gold,* Ayr, 1975, p.30.
[19] *V&P*, 1861, p.903, Notes from 1860 Statistical Register.
[20] *V&P*, 1871-72, p.47, Appendix B, *Report of the Meterological Observer for the Year 1870*

year. The Lands Act of 1868 aimed to promote agriculture and stop sharp practices such as "dummy" purchases by agents of existing landholders. Run-holders who surrendered suitable land were to be offered new, longer-term leases on the balance of their country and also the chance to select land equal in value to improvements such as land clearing.[21] The government of Robert Ramsay McKenzie intended to settle people of modest means on the land, and control "run-jobbing". Similar legislation was enacted in New South Wales and the United States in the 1860s.[22] Land was to be surveyed and classified as agricultural, first-class pastoral or second-class pastoral before each selection. The maximum size of agricultural blocks was two square miles (518ha) and of grazing land 12 square miles (3108ha). Selectors paid one pound an acre (0.4ha) for agricultural land, ten shillings for first-class pastoral and five shillings for second-class pastoral. Research by local historian John Kerr demonstrates that dummying continued in the Burdekin district, that improvement through clearing led to a waste of valuable timber, that selectors without capital and experience were forced to abandon their blocks in drought, and that the classification of most Burdekin land as relatively cheap, second-class pastoral enabled investors to amass large holdings, contrary to the spirit of the law.[23]

In 1864 the government promoted production of sugar and coffee by offering to lease land to prospective planters at one shilling per acre per year, for three years, with the right to purchase at twenty shillings per acre. The architect of the regulation, Chairman of Committees Charles Coxen, MLA for Northern Downs, told Parliament

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[21] Kerr, Black Snow, p.29.
[22] Farnfield, pp.94-107; D.W.A.Baker, "The origins of Robertson's Land Acts", in J.J. Eastwood and F.B.Smith, *Historical Studies, Selected Articles,* Melbourne, 1964, p.126. Baker argued that legislation such as the Crown Lands Alienation Act and Crown Lands Occupation Act in NSW in 1861 did little to settle the "small man" on the land. Instead they enabled "middle-class liberals" to establish superiority over squatters. Likewise the American Homestead Act of 1862 benefited large capitalists more than small farmers.
[23] Kerr, Black Snow, pp.51-52

that investors had already spent 40,000 pounds on introducing cultivation of sugar cane.[24] John Melton Black and Robert Towns selected three blocks, each of 1280ha (518ha) on Cleveland Bay in 1864, for cultivation of sugar and coffee, but later cleared the land along Ross River and Ross Creek for gardens and a boiling-down works.[25]

Dalrymple explored the Herbert River Valley in 1864, and praised its "rich woodlands and plains" with the richest red chocolate loam he had seen in Queensland.[26] Settlers began mixed farming in the Herbert district in 1865, and planted cane from 1871. The district had 500ac under cane by 1874. The Macknade, Gairloch and Beamerside plantations and mills cleared, planted and harvested using indentured labour from South Sea Islands, but some small landholders in the Herbert River Farmers Association, formed in 1882, did their own clearing and cultivating.[27]

Sugar cane reached the Johnstone River district in 1879 when T. H. Fitzgerald, an Irish civil engineer, founded Innisfail Plantation and mill. Another three plantations and mills were opened between 1882 and 1884.[28] Dalrymple had identified the district as suitable for cane-growing during his expedition from Hinchinbrook Island to the Endeavour River in 1873. He estimated 500,000ac (200,000ha) of jungle from Mourilyan Harbour to Bellenden Ker Range could be cleared for tropical agriculture and 300,000ac (120,000ha) specifically for sugar. He hoped his report would be used

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[24] *QPD*, 1st Series, vol.1, 1864, 11 August, p. 301. Charles Coxen intended planters to spend at least twenty shillings an acre during the first three years and plant one-twentieth of the land with sugar-cane or coffee. Blocks were to be between 32ac and 1280ac.
[25] Dorothy Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a Golden Land,* Townsville, 1984, pp.33-34, 38; Kerr, Black Snow, p.61
[26] G.E. Dalrymple, "Report on Journey from Rockingham Bay to Valley of Lagoons", *Journal of Royal Geographical Society,* Vol. xxxv, pp.198-212, cited by Farnfield, pp.70-71.
[27] *V&P,* 1889, p.106 (p.200), Royal Commission to Inquire into the General Condition of the Sugar Industry in Queensland, evidence of John Alm, Halifax, 28 January, 1889.
[28] Dorothy Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas*, Cairns, 1973, pp.139-146. The mills were the Queensland Sugar Company's Innishowen Estate, 1883-1891, Mourilyan Sugar Company's Mourilyan Mill 1884 and the Colonial Sugar Co's Goondi Mill, 1885. Plantings of cane totaled 6534ac (2613ha) by 1900 (P.P. Courtenay, "Agricultural Development on the Wet Coast of North Queensland, 1870-1970", *Lectures on North Queensland History,* Townsville, 1974, p.21.

by Queensland's Agent-General in England to "enlist British capital and labour in the speedy occupation and development of these new and rich agricultural lands".[29] Dalrymple had reservations about the climate of the far North in what he called the "hurricane season" season,[30] and returned to Cardwell in December, 1873, without having properly explored the Daintree district:

> The health of the party suffered from the muggy heat and usual miasmatic influences of mangrove inlets, and new country subjected to alternations of heavy rains and steaming hot sunshine, and I was necessitated to come to the conclusion that on this occasion we could not hope to complete the exploration of this beautiful and valuable region … I sincerely trust that the Government will do me the honour to send me back after the rainy and hurricane season, to finish its exploration.[31]

Archibald Campbell Macmillan, the engineer in charge of building the track from Cooktown to the Palmer River diggings in 1873, introduced plantation cane farming to the Burdekin Delta in 1879, on what *The Queenslander* newspaper described as the largest sugar estate in the colony.[32] He and his business partner Robert William Graham had grown maize, mangoes and oranges for sale in Bowen and Charters Towers on land near Plantation Creek before forming their Burdekin Delta Sugar Company in 1881, in response to high world sugar prices.[33] Macmillan and his partners employed 100 Melanesian and 30 Chinese labourers to clear, cultivate and plant Airdmillan in 1881. They introduced a steam engine-driven plough which covered 10ac (4ha) a day, at about half the cost of a bullock team.[34]

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[29] V&P, 1874, Vol II, G.E. Dalrymple, Narrative of Exploration of the North-East Coast of Queensland, 1873, p. 4, (p.12)
[30] *Ibid.,* p.27 (p.640)
[31] *Ibid.*, p.31 (p.644)
[32] Bolton, A Thousand Miles, p.136, and *Queenslander*, 2 October, 1880, p.420, cited by Kerr, Black Snow, p.74.
[33] Kerr, Black Snow, p.54.
[34] *Ibid.,* p.62, quoting *Queenslander,* 13 November, 1880, p.636, 19 November, 1881, pp.663-664, 3 December, 1881, Supplement, p.3.

Selectors moved on to the eucalyptus woodlands of the Burdekin Delta in 1881-82, when the government opened a portion of the former Jarvisfield run, west of the river, held previously by Robert Towns and Alexander Stuart as grazing land. The settlers paid one pound an acre for 79 blocks covering an area of 70,925ac (28,370ha), and attempted mixed farming.[35]

The clearing and planting of the early 1880s coincided with relatively wet years in the North, followed by near drought from 1883 to 1888.[36] Growers on the Burdekin delta flood-irrigated, following the example of John Drysdale, the Scottish-born railway engineer and manager of Pioneer plantation who showed in 1883 how the aquifer could be tapped using perforated spears to filter out soil.[37] Two years later *The Queenslander* asserted that Burdekin farmers had developed the biggest irrigation system in Australia.[38] Farmers irrigated 2000ac (800ha) from delta lagoons in 1889 and 3020ac (1208ha) in 1892, from wells, creeks and lagoons, to water cane, maize and potatoes.[39]

During the 1880s, governments passed laws intended to encourage increased European settlement in the North. These were the various Pacific Island Labourers Acts and Amendments, bans on importing "coolie" labour from India, the Crown Land Act of 1884 and amendments, and the allocation of 500,000 pounds in 1885 for central mills, exclusively for cane grown by white labour.[40] Premier Samuel Griffith argued in 1884 that the sugar planters' reliance on South Sea Island labour was an

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[35] *Ibid.,* pp.55-56.
[36] The Herbert River district received falls of more than 100 inches each year between 1879 and 1882, followed by falls in the range of 66 to 77 inches up to 1886. Townsville, the nearest weather station to the Burdekin, received relatively high annual rainfall in 1879, 1881 and 1882, and low in 1883, 1885 and 1888, Clement L. Wragge, Government Meteorologist, Special Report on Floods of 1890 with notes on the Meteorology of Previous Seasons, *V&P*, 1890-91,p.8 (p.1075)
[37] R.C. on the Sugar Industry,1889, pp.148-150, evidence of John Drysdale. He said Pioneer raised 4 million gallons a day to irrigate 16 to 20ac, at a cost of five shillings an acre.
[38] Kerr, Black Snow, p.69, quoting from *Queenslander*, 21 November, 1885, p.840.
[39] Powell, Plains of Promise, p.63.
[40] Kerr, Black Snow, pp.113-114, quoting *V&P*, 1886, 2, 16.

impediment to enlargement of the European population, and threatened to produce a sugar industry of large estates managed by a few owners with "large gangs of inferior races".[41] His vision was for agriculture "conducted by farmers working for themselves rather than by men working in large numbers for absentee employers".[42] There were 10,755 Pacific Islanders working in Queensland by 1885,[43] including 632 in the Burdekin district.[44]

Lands Minister Charles Dutton saw his Crown Lands Act of 1884 and amendments of 1885 and 1886, as a curb on "a certain class of people in this country who have exhibited a very inordinate greed for the acquisition and monopoly of land".[45] Griffith, supporting the 1886 amending Bill, said the legislation had aimed to help the "small bona fide farmer" to occupy and settle the land.[46] But homestead selectors still faced exorbitant survey fees and rentals on their 160ac blocks, John Baptist Louis Isambert, MLA for Rosewood, complained to Griffith in 1886. A closer-settlement advocate, Isambert extolled the industry, lawfulness and patriotism of the French peasantry. He said the government had not properly recognised that Queensland's homesteaders, apart from their payment of annual rent or purchase money were "rendering more to Caesar what is Caesars" than any other class in the community.[47]

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[41] *QPD,* L.A. 1st Session, 9th Parliament, 23 January, 1884, debate on Pacific Island Labourers Act Amendment Bill, p. 134.
[42] *QPD,* L.A., 3rd Session, 9th Parliament, 15 October, 1885, debate on Pacific Island Labourers Amendment Bill, p. 1078.
[43] *Commonwealth of Australia PP,* 1901, Report on Some Factors Relating to the Cane Sugar Industry of Australia*,* by Walter Maxwell, p.2 (p.276)
[44] Lincoln Hayes, *On Plantation Creek,* Ayr, 2001, p. 47, citing Records of Inspector of Pacific Islanders, Townsville district [QSA IPI 1/11]
[45] QPD, L.A., 1884, vol.XLIII, 2nd session 9th Parliament, Crown Land Bill Second reading, p.251
[46] QPD, L.A. vol.XLIX, 4th session 9th Parliament, Crown Lands Act Amendment Bill, second reading, 28 September, p.980
[47] QLA V&P, 1886, Lands Department Annual Report, J.B.L. Isambert, of Townsville, to The Hon S.W.Griffith, Brisbane Homestead Clause (74) of The Land Act of 1884, pp. 3-4 (pp.1109-1110)

The government established the Department of Agriculture in 1887 to help settlers make their land a paying proposition, and to encourage settlement by improving information on the nature and quality of land open for occupation. The department was to "assist in the collection and diffusion of practical knowledge as to the profitable cultivation of the soil".[48] In effect, the government hoped to use scientific knowledge to extend the limits to agricultural growth, such as soil fertility, plant and animal disease and restricted gene pools in plant and animal-breeding programs. The government appointed Edward Shelton, Professor of Agriculture in the Kansas State Agricultural College, as Queensland Instructor in Agriculture in 1889, after searching for a "competent man acquainted with the US methods, both of instruction and practical operation".[49]

Clement Wragge persuaded the government to appoint him as a meteorological observer in 1887, arguing that a reliable service would benefit agriculture, planting, mining, pastoral and shipping interests, and that rainfall and temperature records could be used as a guide for the opening and settlement of new districts.[50]

Farmers began supplying sugar directly to mills in the 1880s. In the Lower Herbert, 26 small farmers grew about 1100ac (440ha), or 20 per cent of the 1888

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[48] *QPD LA*, 1887, vol.LL, 5th Session 9th Parliament, 20 July, opening speech and address in reply, p. 4, p. 49.

[49] *V&P*, 1888, Chief Secretary Queensland to US Minister for Agriculture, 15 December, 1887; Report of Instructor in Agriculture, in Annual Report, Department of Agriculture, 1889-90, *QPP,* 3rd Session, 10th Parliament, vol.3, p.12 (p. 746). Professor Shelton became principal of the Agricultural College at Gatton, in 1897, and resigned in 1898, after controversy over his handling of what he described as "disorders" among students (*QPD*, vol.29, 1898, 3rd session, 12th Parliament, 11 August, pp.183-184

[50] Report on Meteorological Inspection and Proposals for a new Meteorological Organisation, *V&P* 1886, vol.3, p.971; Paul W. Wilson, "Wragge, Clement Lindley", *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* vol 12, Melbourne, 1990, pp.576-577. Wragge resigned from his Chief Weather Bureau, Brisbane, in June, 1903.

crush for the four mills.[51] Colonial Sugar announced plans in 1892 to split up its estates in the North and leased land to farmers in the Herbert and Johnstone river districts and Mackay in 1893.[52] Geoffrey Bolton has observed that by the mid-1890s, small-scale farming had become the principal form of sugar growing in Queensland. He cites an estimate that by 1894 more than 90 per cent of the state's canegrowers were operating on farms of less than 90ac (36ha).[53] In 1890, a total of 13,711ac (5484ha) of cane was grown on the flats of the Lower Burdekin River, Lower Herbert River and Johnstone River. The crop expanded by 10,106ac (4042ha) during the 1890s, to 23,817ac (9526ha) in 1901.[54]

Some farmers told the Royal Commission into the General Condition of the Sugar Cane Industry in 1889 that they were worried they relied too much on cane and knew too little of farming science. William Thomas White, a government surveyor in the Herbert River district and a dairy farmer, said the prosperity of the district depended entirely on the sugar industry, either directly through canegrowing, or indirectly through supply of produce and fencing materials. He advocated more mixed farming, combining dairying and agriculture.[55] Archibald Macmillan considered the Burdekin district could go ahead, "apart from sugar altogether" with improved transport for perishable produce to Charters Towers, Townsville and Ravenswood.[56]

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[51] R.C on the Sugar Industry in Queensland,1888, p.134 (p228), evidence of William Stanley Warren, Land Commissioner and Crown Lands Ranger. The four were Colonial Sugar Co 2923ac, F and A Neame, Macknade, 690ac, Wood Bros and Boyd, Ripple Creek, 720ac, Wittingham Bros, Hamleigh, 500ac. There were also 26 selectors who grew 1100ac between them.

[52] Bolton, pp.201-203

[53] *Ibid.,* p.236

[54] *V&P,* 1891-92, p.21, Department of Agriculture Annual Report; *V&P,*1901, p.29 (p.237), Department of Agriculture Annual Report.

[55] R.C. on the Sugar Industry in Queensland, 1888, pp.131-133 (pp.225-227). White was also chairman of the Divisional Board.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 144 (p.238), Airdmillan hearings, 6 February, 1889. Ten years later, MacMillan told the Royal Commission into Railway Extensions (V&P vol. 3, 1900, p.82) that poor transport links meant very little produce other than sugar left the district.

Neils Christian Rosendahl, a member of the Herbert River Farmers Association and resident 15 or so years, said he and his colleagues needed an experimental farm to guide them: "We are all Europeans coming into a tropical country and we really do not understand what can be grown. We have to struggle to keep the pot boiling and have little time for experiments."[57] Fellow association member Charles Watson agreed. He said he and his family could not live from the produce of the 160ac (64ha) homestead block he had farmed for the previous five years. He had cultivated 15ac (6ha) and, apart from 5ac (2ha) of cane, had tried corn, potatoes, mangoes and oranges. Sending mangoes to Townsville cost too much. An experimental farm would help him and others lacking experience in the tropics. "You may get information out of papers, but it is not like seeing produce actually growing in the field," he pointed out.[58]

The commissioners sought farmers' views on the climate. John Traherne Williams, surgeon and medical officer for Ayr and the Burdekin, told the chairman, William H. Groom, he considered the climate comparatively healthy for Europeans, based on 12 months' experience.[59] Neils Rosendahl was not convinced cane could be grown by white labour.[60] The commission found that white people should not be expected to work north of Townsville and recommended a reprieve for the black-labour based plantation system.[61]

Edward Shelton toured the colony and began lobbying in 1891 for the establishment of an agricultural college and a tropical agriculture experiment station. He reported that he had found farmers biased to "old country ways of doing and thinking" and lacking in the "Yankee knack of taking short cuts to desired ends".

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[57] *Ibid.,* hearings, 28 January, p.202.
[58] *Ibid.*, Halifax, 28 January, pp.110-112 (pp.204-206)
[59] *Ibid.,* Ayr, 6 February, 1889, John Traherne Williams, p.145 (p.239).
[60] *Ibid.,*Halifax, 28 January, Neils Christian Rosendahl, p.109 (p.203).
[61] Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness,* Melbourne, 2002, p.88

These farmers had as a rule come to their work absolutely without means and without knowledge of farming beyond certain specialities practised as labourers in Europe. He observed that their children sought city jobs for stimulation and education, to escape a colourless and flavourless existence. He found townspeople considered farmers "deficient in intelligence, knowledge and enterprise, and that their labours are but indifferently rewarded." "The want of Queensland is not a class of cringing peasantry, however industrious, but self-reliant and self-respecting citizens," he said.[62]

Shelton had economic and environmental reasons for questioning the dominance of plantation-grown sugar cane after a tour of North Queensland in 1890. He saw the plantation system with its cheap, indentured labour, as inherently unprofitable. He considered that plantation yields of 20 tons of cane per acre in northern sugar districts were unsatisfactory and argued that small farmers could do better with practices such as heavy manuring, deep ploughing and unspecified mechanisation. His misgivings about single-crop farming were based on experience in the United States, where profits had been cancelled by exhaustion of the soil:

> All nature seems at war with the special farmer: Insect and fungus pests concentrate upon him; the weeds best fitted to survive the cultivation given the special crop encumber his fields; and the crop itself, while constantly robbing the soil, is unable in the nature of things to furnish that renovating treatment which always goes with varied cultivation.[63]

Reporting on his tour from Rockhampton to Cairns and west to Hughenden, from March to May, 1890, he wrote of having found fertile soil, valuable timber, oceans of nutritious native grasses, streams of clear water and excellent harbours.[64]

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[62] V&P, vol.9, 1891-92, Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1891, Report of Instructor in Agriculture for year ending 31 May, 1891, p.17.
[63] *QPP*, 3rd Session, 1889-90, Vol III, Annual Report Department of Agriculture, Appendix A, Report of Instructor In Agriculture, p.13 (p.747)
[64] *Ibid.,* p.12 [p.746]

The Wet had brought good rains between Townsville and Innisfail, seemingly ending the drought of the late 1880s.[65] He was surprised at what he saw as the slight use being made of the colony's abundant natural resources and advocated rotating sugar cane with potatoes, maize, millet, sorghum and tropical fruits, dairy cattle and pigs. Canning, drying works, bacon factories and co-operative dairies were sure to follow. He recommended opening an experiment station in the North and an agricultural college, to help solve "the multitude of questions which press daily upon the farmers in their daily work". Queensland had to decide "how to place the great public domain in the hands of real farmers", perhaps by recruiting settlers from America, Europe and neighbouring Australian colonies.[66]

Sugar industry after Federation

Thousands of small farmers controlled Queensland's cane production in 1901, with "abundant room for more men and families upon the areas suitable for cane culture", according to Dr Walter Maxwell, director of the State's new Bureau of Experiment Stations.[67] Maxwell, a former director of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, investigated possible constraints on the industry, including a shortage of fit, white labourers in the tropics, declining productivity and soil exhaustion. He said witnesses had told him that in the North, continuous labour by white men, even in work reserved to them by the Polynesian Labourers Act, was a "great physical strain and difficulty". He suggested mechanical cultivating and harvesting, then on the

[65] *T D Bulletin,* 8 January, 1964, Townsville received 69 inches in January, February and March, 1890, remembered as a flood year; *The Johnstone River Advocate,* 28 January, 1930, Innisfail, then called Geraldton, received 76 inches in the same period, compared with 45 inches in 1888.
[66] *QPP,* 3rd Session, 1889-90, Report of Instructor in Agriculture, p.13 [p.747]
[67] Harry Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry*, Brisbane, 1931, p16; Bolton, A Thousand Miles, pp.246-247; *QPP*, vol.4, 1901, Walter Maxwell, A Report on Some Factors Relating to the Cane Sugar Industry of Australia, p.2 (p.274).

drawing board, could allow the industry to carry on with white labour.

Maxwell remarked on evidence to the 1889 Royal Commission, that cane production had declined from 40 tons to acre per annum to as little as 12 tons, because of depleted soils. Research by the Bureau of Experiment Stations showed large losses in lime, potash and nitrogen from virgin soils.[68] He predicted the "native fertility" of the soil could be restored by modern methods of cultivation, use of fertilisers and by reducing farm size. Queensland needed to acquire more cane-growers, on smaller farms, to ensure improved cultivation and care of the crop and ultimately a larger yield, "by means of an increased proportion of white men and diminishing proportion of other kinds of labourers". He saw ownership of the land by "free men with a personal interest in occupancy of the lands" as likely to lead to "a higher producing power of the soils".[69]

Prime Minister Edmund Barton noted Maxwell's concerns about poor farming practice during debate on the Pacific Islands Labourers Bill in October, 1901.[70] He hoped the ban on cheap labour would achieve an improvement:

> Those who turn to Dr Maxwell's reports, both that which he gave to the Queensland Government and that which he has so honestly rendered to me, will come to the conclusion that he describes a state of crudity in method; a progressive deterioration of the soil due to the failure to replace in it those elements which the sugar cane takes out of it; and a neglect of those methods of cultivation which, when applied elsewhere, have been highly beneficial to the industry.[71]

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[68] Maxwell, Cane Sugar Industry of Australia, pp.9-11. Comparing virgin and cropped soils, he recorded a 37 per cent loss of lime, 42 per cent loss of potash and 31 per cent loss of nitrogen

[69] *Ibid.,* p11

[70] *N.Q. Register,* 18 April, 1931, the Sugar Bounty Act of 1902, repealed in 1913, raised the Commonwealth 2.6 million pounds in duties.

[71] *CofA PD*, 1901-02, vol iv, pp. 5493-5494, p.5501, 2 October, 1901. The Bill offered tariff protection of 6 pounds per ton on imported cane sugar and 10 pounds on beet sugar, as well as the labour legislation which gave planters three years to replace their Melanesian workers, and an increased bounty to any grower who switched exclusively to white labour by 1905.

Political rhetoric on the cane industry up to the 1960s usually stressed its potential for filling the North's empty spaces with white people. A Queensland government board of inquiry in 1916 saw settlement of the state's northern coast lands "by people of our own race" as the primary object of expansion. Every new settlement meant additional defenders and reduced the chance of another nation seizing unoccupied land. The board members quoted the report of the Commonwealth Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry, tabled in 1912, that the industry must be protected because of its contribution to the settlement and defence of the northern portions of Australia. Settling tropical and sub-tropical areas by a white population "living under standard conditions of life" was one of the Commonwealth's gravest problems, they said.[72]

Millers and growers, who formed their lobby groups the Australian Sugar Producers Association in 1907 and the United Cane Growers Association in 1913, sought help from both state and federal governments, using what Marjorie Pagani has called "the rhetoric of national interest, peopling the north, defending white Australia and creating a bulwark against racial impurity".[73] Conservative State Premier Digby Denham acknowledged the importance of the sugar industry in 1911 when negotiating to settle the strike which paralysed it for four months: "I say this industry is a big thing and there is no other means of protecting that part of our coast."[74] The Commonwealth responded to the strike with a royal commission into relations between millers and growers, working conditions and the world sugar trade. The

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Barton said one-quarter of the 475,000ac (190,000ha) of land under cultivation in Queensland in 1900 was planted to cane.

[72] *QPP*, 1916-17, vol.2, p.833, Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry; cited by Bolton, A Thousand Miles, p.309

[73] Marjorie Pagani, *T.W. Crawford –Politics and the Queensland Sugar Industry,* Townsville, 1989, p.36

[74] *QPD*, L.A., 3rd Session, 18th Parliament, vol.cvIII, 13 July 1911, pp.42-46, The Amalgamated Workers' Association called the strike, seeking an eight hour day and a minimum wage of 30 shillings a week and keep for mill workers and increased rates for cane cutters.

commissioners recommended federal control of cane and raw sugar prices, abolition of the bounty and excise duty, and a sliding scale of customs duties.[75] The Commonwealth Government repealed its excise and bounty acts in 1913, after agitation from growers, and handed control of the industry back to the State.[76]

The State Labor Government's Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Act and Sugar Acquisition Act of 1915 formalised State control. The government set up the Queensland Sugar Board and bought the entire crop for distribution by the Commonwealth at 18 pounds a ton for raw sugar. Premier Thomas Ryan said the Acts aimed at establishing independent tribunals to fix the price of sugar cane and ensuring growers received adequate and fair prices.[77] Agriculture Secretary William Lennon told Parliament he saw the Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Bill as a means of preserving "the great principle of a White Australia". The cost of protecting the industry through Commonwealth customs duties on imported sugar valued at 1 million to 1.5 million pounds per annum was a contribution from the people of Australia to maintaining a White Australia.[78]

The Ryan Government introduced laws in 1915 and 1916 intended to allow more "landless men" to select land through perpetual leasehold,[79] and which gave concessions to soldier-settlers. The Secretary for Public Lands, John McEwan Hunter,

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[75] Bolton, A Thousand Miles, pp.70-71.

[76] *QPD,* 1st session, 20th Parliament, 1915-16, pp.414-415, Secretary of Agriculture, William Lennon said, in Second Reading of Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Bill that the Commonwealth Government had repealed its Excise and Bounty Acts because of agitation from canegrowers, and their associations. This had replaced responsibility for the industry on the Queensland Government.

[77] *Ibid.,* p.339, 4 August, initiation of Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Bill; *QPP,* 1916-1917, vol.2 of 3, Report of the Board of Inquiry Into the Sugar Industry, pxxviii, p.834, notes that the Acquisition Act was a war-time measure to secure the miller and grower a better return than possible under price fixing by southern States.

[78] *Ibid,* pp.414-415, 25 August, Second Reading. The 1916 Board of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry, p.16, noted that the Herbert and Johnstone River districts had a total of 461 farmers, 145 or 31 per cent of whom were non-British. Nearly three-quarters of these settlers were from Italy.

[79] *QPD*, 2nd session, 20th Parliament, 1916-17, vol.cxxiii, p.426, 8 September, 1916, Secretary for Public Lands, John McEwan Hunter, initiation of Land Act Amendment Bill.

said the Land Act Amendment Bill aimed to open undeveloped dairy, tobacco and fruit-growing country, and "immense tracts of forests that are being neglected and which today should be worth large sums of money to the state".[80] Hunter, the member for Maranoa, listed the "sugar lands" of the Johnstone and Tully Rivers among areas capable of carrying a large population if occupied by the right sort of people.[81] The Ryan government acquired 157,000ac (62,800ha) of Innisfail district land for selection for sugar growing, dairying and general agriculture under its Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act of 1917.[82]

James Tolmie, Member for Toowoomba and a former Minister for Agriculture in Digby Denham's Liberal Government, was sceptical about the new Land Act, suggesting that lack of access to markets was the greatest barrier to opening great areas of land suitable for settlement.[83] He argued the case for freehold title as a stimulus to development and prosperity, citing the example of the "peasant proprietary" of France which he rated as "one of the most prosperous countries in the world"[84] Similar ideas were debated in 1929 and 1957 when the Moore and Nicklin Governments respectively decided to permit leaseholders and selectors to convert Crown land held under perpetual lease to freehold. [85] Labor saw the freeholding of

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[80] *QPD*, 1st session, 20th Parliament, 1915, vol.cxxii, p.2537, 1 December, 1915, Second Reading, Land Act Amendment Bill.
[81] *Ibid.*, p.2538
[82] *QPP* 1931, vol.2, Report of the Department of Public Lands for year ended 31 December, 1930, p. 8 (p.214), noted that the Land Acts Amendment Bill was supposed to minimise speculation and help settlers of limited means. It allowed leaseholders to live away from their selections for the first two years, while clearing and cultivating, recognising they could be in full employment off the farm. Fitzgerald, From 1915, p.57; Alan Hudson, *By the Banyan: Tully Sugar, the First 75 Years,* Brisbane, 2000, pp.83-85, notes that by 1923, 80 ex-servicemen had settled at El Arish, south of Innisfail. Their cane harvest increased from 6000t in 1922 to 40,000t in 1925, when Tully Mill opened.
[83] *QPD*, 1st session, 20th Parliament, 1915, vol.cxxii, p. 2543
[84] *Ibid.,* p2547.
[85] *Queensland Yearbook,* 1961, no.22, Land and Settlement, p.129; *QPD*, 1929, vol.cliii, p.11, 21 August, Address in Reply; QPD, 1929, vol.cliv, pp.1284-1348, debate of Land Acts Amendment Bill; QPD, vol cliv, 1929, 30 October, p.1285, Vivian Hoyles Tozer, MLA, Gympie, argued during debate on the Lands Amendment Bill, 1929, that freeholding would

Crown land as selling the heritage of the people, and as an inferior means of "improving" the land.[86] Labor Opposition leader in 1957, Leslie Wood, MLA for North Townsville, argued that conditional leasehold forced landholders to develop their land, while there were no legal obligations on freeholders.[87]

The federal government led by Prime Minister Billy Hughes held another sugar Royal Commission in 1920, and lifted the price of raw sugar from 21 pounds a ton to 30 pounds six shillings and eightpence a ton, and refined sugar to sixpence a pound retail, aiming to make Australia self-sufficient in sugar. World raw sugar prices ranged, on average, from 50 pounds to 78 pounds a ton at this time.[88] However, the boom was short-lived and in 1923 the government renegotiated the prices to 27 pounds a ton for raw sugar and fourpence halfpenny for refined sugar in capital cities. It also banned imported sugar under the Sugar Act of 1923. Sugar plantings throughout Queensland increased 65 per cent from 1920 to 1925, when 44 per cent of the crop was exported.[89]

The guaranteed prices stimulated cane production between Home Hill and Innisfail, which increased from 925,906 tons grown on 49,031ac (17,212ha) in 1920, to 1.6 million tons grown on 80,667ac (32,266ha) in 1930.[90] Irrigation trebled in the

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hasten occupation of 89 million ac (35 million ha) available for settlement, otherwise some other country would insist on putting the land to productive use.

[86] *QPD,* 1st session, 35th Parliament, 1957-58, p.1016, 13 November, Land Acts and other Acts Amendment Bill, John Joseph Dufficy, Labor MLA, Warrego, argued that Parliament should see itself as custodian of the assets of the state, chiefly the land, "It is land that belongs to the people and the millions yet to be born will have some interest in it when their day arrives."

[87] *QPD*, 1st session, 35th Parliament, 1957-58, p.1156; Most sugar farming country in the Herbert and Burdekin districts appears to have been held under freehold title by 1930. George Harold Hopkins, of the Ingham Chamber of Commerce, told the 1931 RC on Development of North Queensland, "a large part of the Herbert River district consists of freehold lands, alienated from the Crown in the early days of settlement, when cattle raising was practically the only industry carried on. Most of it could be acquired by sale or resumption for quite reasonable prices". (*N.Q. Register,* 10 June, 1931).

[88] A. F. Bell, "Some Notes on the History and Development of the Sugar Industry", in *The Australian Sugar Yearbook,* 1950, p24; *North Queensland Register,* 18 April, 1931

[89] Fitzgerald, From 1915, p.65.

[90] *QPP* vol 2, 1929, Report of Registrar General on Agricultural Production, 1928.

Burdekin during the 1920s, from 177 irrigators watering 6004ac (2,401ha) from wells, lagoons and the river in 1919, to 521 irrigating 20,090ac (8036ha), from spears and wells, in 1929.[91] Farming in the Herbert River district increased by 75 per cent in the same period, from 23,777ac (9,510ha) to 41,493ac (16,597ha).[92]

The state government introduced a production quota system in 1925 as prices fell and supply outstripped domestic demand. The Central Sugar Cane Prices Board allocated each grower a maximum area on which cane could be grown for supply to a mill. This was known as the grower's "gross assignment". They were entitled to harvest 75 per cent of this area annually.[93] Returns were determined by sugar content, which growers attempted to maximise with help from the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations. The board reviewed gross and net assignments annually.[94] Would-be growers could not sell cane without an assignment. The government gave farmers input into this increasingly complex process through mill suppliers' committees, established in 1926. The mill committees, in turn, sent delegates to district executive meetings which elected representatives to annual state conferences.[95] Ten mills operated between Innisfail and Home Hill by this time.

The world market collapsed in 1929.[96] The sugar board responded by re-setting the domestic price of raw sugar at 19 pounds 10 shillings a ton and introducing ceilings, or "peaks" on how much raw sugar each mill was permitted to produce for the Australian market. These were based on the highest output achieved by each mill

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[91] *QPP* 1930, vol 2 of 2, Report of Registrar-General on Agricultural Production for 1929, table XIV, p184.
[92] Statistics of the State of Queensland, 1920-1970. Two new mills opened during the 1920s, the Haughton Sugar Company's incita, at Giru, in 1921, and Tully's co-operative mill in 1926, giving 256 farmers, 74 of them soldier-settlers, a new outlet for their cane. (Kerr, Black Snow,p.109, Hudson, Banyan, p. 41).
[93] *The Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol.20, 1961, Brisbane, 1961, p.67.
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] Bell, Some Notes on History of Sugar Industry, p.21
[96] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes,* London, 1997, p. 95, says Australia and other exporters were hit hard by a slump in prices of foodstuffs and raw materials after the Wall Street Crash on 29 October, 1929. World trade declined by 60 per cent in 1929-1930.

between 1915 and 1929, a formula which caused friction between mill suppliers in ensuing years.[97]

Relatively small areas of the coastal strip from Home Hill to Innisfail were cleared for cane-growing between 1930 and 1950.[98] The Royal Commission had assessed that the sugar industry could not be expanded for "many years", with 45 per cent of the crop being exported at world parity prices in 1931. A federal government committee of inquiry in 1930, which recommended continuation of Australia's ban on imported sugar, described canegrowers' average returns as "exceedingly low", at 2.2 per cent on investment. State and federal government politicians and industry representatives decided in 1932 to recommend a halfpenny per pound reduction in the retail price of refined sugar to placate hostility from southern states over the import ban.[99] Britain was the major export market for Australian sugar in this period, taking 200,000 tons in 1930, for example.[100] Australia signed an international sugar agreement with 21 other exporters in 1937 entitling it to export 408,163 tons. This accord collapsed at the beginning of World War II, when Britain agreed to take all of Australia's surplus production.[101]

Despite the virtual ban on opening new cane farming country, Australian refined sugar output climbed from 538,063 tons in 1929 to 805,894 tons in 1940, while average returns per ton fell from about 20 pounds in 1930 to 17 pounds in 1940.

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[97] Fitzgerald, From 1915, p.6. Surplus production was exported, usually at reduced prices. From 1930 raw sugar for the domestic market went into what became known as "number one pool" and the rest into "number two pool". Returns from this pool had declined to five pounds 12 shillings per ton by October, 1930.

[98] John M Tanzer, *An Investigation of New Settlement in the Sugar Industry as a result of Post-War Expansion*, BEc (hons) thesis, JCU Department of Geography, p.37

[99] *QPP*, 1932, vol.2, Annual Report of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations (p.567)

[100] *QPP* 1931, vol.2, Annual Report of Department of Agriculture and Stock, Chief Secretary's report (p733)

[101] Tanzer, Investigation of New Settlement, p.37; *QPP* 1940, vol.1, Annual Report BSES, p.2 (p.968)

Exports increased from 37 per cent of output in 1929 to 50 per cent in 1940.[102]

In his 1940 annual report, the director of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, Dr Bill Kerr, attributed the increased productivity to superior cane varieties, elimination of loss due to diseases, increased areas of cultivation and improved farming practice, including "more rational use of manures".[103] He had recommended in 1939 that growers should sow their fallow land to leguminous green manure crops to compensate for shortages of sulphate of ammonia.[104] Some Herbert River district farmers had complained in 1934 about being made to burn trash as a means of controlling vermin thought to spread Weils Disease. They argued that the trash was their traditional source of green manure and stock feed.[105]

A Royal Commission in 1939 found large areas of cane unharvested because of over-production[106] and recommended further control through a farm-peaks system, giving growers production targets in tons, as well as allocating assignments. Raw sugar production in North Queensland declined from 891,000t in 1939 to 486,000t in 1943,[107] because of labour, fertiliser and farm machinery shortages. Farmers fertilised their crops with blood and bone when the war cut supplies of superphosphate and urea by two-thirds.[108] Two of the Burdekin mills, Kalamia and Pioneer were shut down in 1942 after reaching their peak allocations, leaving 80,000 tons of cane unharvested.[109]

The use of nitrogen and phosphorous-based fertilisers in the North climbed

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[102] Michael Anthony Jones, *The Government and Economic Growth in Queensland, 1930-1940,* University of Queensland thesis for B Ec with hons in history, pp.39-45.
[103] *QPP* 1940, vol.1, Annual Report BSES, p2
[104] *The Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News,* 12 September, 1939
[105] William A. Douglass, *Italy to Ingham,* Brisbane, 1995, p.134; *N.Q. Register,* 25 August, 1934; *Australian Sugar Journal,* 8 June, 1934, p.134.
[106] Fitzgerald, From 1915, p.178
[107] A.F. Bell, *Some Notes on the History and Development of the Sugar Industry*, p23; *Australian Sugar Year Book 1946-47,* L.G. Vallance, "Five Years of Fertilizer Rationing", p.99, fertiliser use declined from 61,000 tons in 1939, to 15,000 tons in 1943. Yield of sugar declined from 3.41 tons per acre to 2.125 tons in the same period.
[108] *QPP*, 1943, vol 1, Annual Report of Department of Agriculture, (p634).
[109] Kerr, Black Snow, p.95.

after World War II, in part reflecting expansion in the Herbert and Burdekin districts. Applications of nitrogen in the Herbert district increased from 500t in 1945 to 4200t in 1970, and from 40t to 1000t in the Burdekin. Use of phosphorous increased from 150t in 1945 to 720t in 1970 in the Herbert, but only marginally, from 35t to 92t in the Burdekin, where phosphorous was regarded as having little impact on productivity.[110] Burdekin farmers were said to be using up to 6 hundredweight of fertiliser per acre on plant cane and up to 10 hundredweight on ratoons to maximise production after the war.[111] Agricultural lime appears to have been required in the wet tropics end of the region, indicated by farmers' discussions in 1946 about forming a co-operative society to run a lime plant capable of producing 20,000t a year.[112]

The case for fortifying North Queensland with sugar growers seemed vindicated after the war. Supporters argued that the industry's infrastructure of roads, railways, ports and townships had helped the Allies win. Queensland's Under-Secretary of Agriculture, Arthur Bell, wrote in 1950, "nobody knowing anything of the war position can fail to be grateful that the Queensland tropical coast was populated and developed." [113] The new State Premier, Ned Hanlon foreshadowed further expansion in 1946, asserting the region must be populated for the sake of the

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[110] J.S. Pulsford, *Historical Nutrient Usage in Coastal Queensland River Catchments Adjacent to the Great Barrier Marine Park,* Townsville, 1996, p.13, p.19. Pulsford, pp. 45-47, found that introduction of cheaper forms of nitrogen fertilizers, such as urea in 1958 and aqua ammonia in 1962, and introduction of a 25 per cent nitrogen price subsidy in 1966 contributed to increased usage of nitrogen. Phosphorous was used in the adjoining Burdekin and Haughton basins for plant cane and other field and horticultural crops and pastures, but rarely on ratoon cane. Usage of phosphorous has increased in the past 20 years with the expansion of cane-growing on to less-fertile country.

[111] *QPD,* 1951, p.242, 1951, Colin George McCathie, MLA Haughton: 'the cane farmer … with a fixed assignment is forced to farm the same area year in and year out because with the demand that exists for the production of sugar it is not possible for him to fallow his land. At present in the river lands of the Burdekin area, farmers with plant cane are using up to 6cwt of fertilizer to the acre and up to 9 and 10cwt on ratoon crops. This might be good from the point of view of the fertilizer companies but it is not in the best interests of the soil.'

[112] *T.D. Bulletin,* 28 November, 1946

[113] Bell, Some Notes, p.3

survival of white civilisation in Australia.[114] The state government began by lifting sugar mill production quotas by 3 per cent to enable 228 returned soldiers to settle on cane farms.

Britain had introduced a 500,000t per annum quota for Australian sugar in 1949, and lifted this to 630,000t in 1951, in effect doubling the pre-war imports. The Central Sugar Cane Board announced plans to increase the total assigned area by 37 per cent, from 176,272ha (435,391ac) to 242,042ha (597,843ac), providing for 1074 new cane farms,[115] the largest number of them, 118, to be in the previously heavy timbered Abergowrie district of the Herbert River valley.[116] Miller CSR duplicated Victoria Mill, to crush 21, 000 tons of cane a week, making it the largest mill in the Southern Hemisphere in 1953. Sugar export prices rose to forty-two pounds six shillings and eightpence a ton in 1953. Herbert River canegrowers recruited 395 Italian migrants to help cut and haul the 998,000 ton harvest in 1955.

The 10 sugar mills from Home Hill to Innisfail crushed 1.8 million tons of cane in 1940, compared with 3.4 million tons in 1960. The cane crop in the Burdekin, Herbert and Tully-Johnstone districts covered 136,027ac (54,410ha) in 1940, compared with 195,244ac (78,097ac). In 1970, the cane was grown by 1990 suppliers, on an average farm size of 74ac (30ha) in 1940, compared with 2238 suppliers, with an average farm size of 87ac (35ha) in 1960.[117] The total Australian harvest in 1960 was about 9 million tons, yielding 1.4 million tons of raw sugar, produced on 9500 farms, covering 600,000ac (240,000ha). The national average cane farm size in 1960 was 60ac (24ha).[118]

Mechanical harvesting caught on in this period. By 1968, 72 per cent of the State crop

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[114] *QPD* 188, 3. 10/46, p.6, quoted in *Queensland Political Portraits*, p445
[115] Tanzer, p38
[116] *Canegrowers Bulletin*, May 1951.
[117] Statistics from *Australian Sugar Yearbooks*, 1941-1961
[118] *Australian Sugar Yearbook*, 1960, p78

was harvested mechanically.[119]

Demand see-sawed in the 1960s. Prices slumped in 1961, before the row between the US and its raw sugar-provider, Cuba, in 1962 and crashed again in 1964. The state government, in the midst of these peaks and troughs, held an inquiry which predicted a bright future and recommended opening up 150,407ac (42,162ha) for 1000 new farms and doubling mill peaks. The inquiry, headed by Justice Harry Gibbs proposed new assignments in the Burdekin totalling 19,514ac (7,805ha) and north of Townsville totalling 68,110ac (27,244ha). Farmers on soldier-settler blocks in the Clare, Millaroo and Dalbeg districts of the Burdekin who had previously struggled with tobacco were given assignments to grow 1000 tons of cane.[120] The Herbert River Canegrowers Association and *The Townsville Bulletin* warned against the expansion as prices began to fall in 1964 and growers from the Tully and Johnstone River districts swamped the Regional Assignment Committee with 700 applications for increased assignments. The paper noted that Queenslanders had had sad experiences with lands, such as those at Clare, developed by governments and thrown open to settlers at unrealistic valuations.[121] The director of Sugar Experiment Stations, N.J. King, predicted problems with pests, plant nutrition and drainage, unless cane growing was restricted to suitable country, and argued for increased resources for extension work.[122]

Farmers in the sugar districts from Bowen to the Johnstone River expanded cane plantings about tenfold, from 23,817ac (9526ha) to 258,895ac (103,438ha),

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[119] *Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol.29, 1970, p.xxiii.
[120] *Ibid.,* 1964, p.25.
[121] *T.D. Bulletin*, 2 February, 1964; HRCGA cited by Ford, p138; *Evening Advocate,* Innisfail, 8 April, 1964.
[122] *Australian Sugar Year Book,* 1964, p.43.

between 1901 and 1970.[123] The population along the coast from Ayr to the Cardwell district increased from 23,397 in 1901, to 105,523 in 1971. The city of Townsville grew from 12,717 to 71,265 in this time,[124] and was promoted by a People The North Committee as the world's largest white settlement in the tropics.[125] Sugar cane was still the mainstay of the North in 1970, when 2737 suppliers sent 6.7 million tons to the 10 mills from Home Hill to Innisfail. The Australian harvest doubled between 1960 and 1968, from 9 million tons to 18.5 million tons.[126]

Critics in the 1930s saw economic and, perhaps, social justice arguments against sugar's dominance. They included, to the surprise of *The North Queensland Register*, Dr Charles Yonge, leader of a scientific expedition to the Low Isles of the Great Barrier Reef, in 1928-29. Yonge's article in *Empire Review* in 1931, criticising the industry's protected status, amounted to "one below the belt", the *Register* complained. Dr Yonge argued that the rest of Australia was paying a "gigantic subsidy" to sugar growers to maintain the White Australia policy in the North. Why not end this farce and develop tropical parts of the North using coloured labour, under the direction of "Australians"? he asked. The secretary of the Australian Sugar Growers Association, Mr F.C.P. Curlewis, replied in the *Register* that growers were receiving their lowest prices in 16 years, and that the industry was maintaining employment in the North with a subsidy equivalent to two seats a year in the picture

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[123] *V&P,* V&P, 1901, Department of Agriculture annual report, p.29 (p.237); *The Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol 31, 1972, production statistics from Innisfail, Herbert and Burdekin districts.

[124] QPP, 1902, vol 3, Census of Queensland, 1901, part 9, population figures for Townsville and Cardwell statistical districts (Townsville's bordered by the Burdekin River in the south and Cardwell's by Clump Point in the north); *Commonwealth of Australia, Census of Population and Housing, 1971,*Canberra, 1973: Bulletin 7, part 3, Queensland

[125] *Innisfail Evening Advocate,* 1 September, 1964, Larry Foley, news reporter, People the North Committee, says, "it does seem that in Townsville, as indeed in its sister cities of Mackay and Cairns, Australia has a unique chance to lead the world in adapting western ways of work, especially in heavy industry, manufacturing and research, to tropical conditions".

[126] *The Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol 20, 1970, pxxii: Producers harvested 258,895ac (103,558ha), average farm size of 94ac (37ha).

theatres.[127] Free-traders and protectionists had been arguing for months about the Commonwealth Government's justification for extending its ban on imported sugar earlier in 1931, after its sugar inquiry in 1930. Critics such as Ulick Browne, a grazier, of Garomna, Julia Creek reminded readers that world sugar production exceeded consumption by more than a million pounds a year.[128] Mr Browne wrote to the *Register* in April, 1931, after news of the extension of the embargo for five years, quoting Griffith Taylor on limits to growth in Australia:

> It is time we stopped wailing over our supposedly underdeveloped and underpopulated country, suggesting for instance that the Northern coastline could ever be brought into sugar production.[129]

Conclusions

The Australian Sugar producers Association and Australian Cane Growers' Council took pride in the efficiency of their industry. By 1970, Australia had advanced to become the world's fourth-largest cane sugar-producing country, behind Cuba, Brazil and India, through comprehensive government controls and efficient production methods. Mechanisation in the cane fields and mills enabled European labour to achieve high productivity compared with other countries. Furthermore, the industry had provided infrastructure in North Queensland which had played an important part in the defence of Australia in World War II.[130]

Farmers from the 1880s onwards received guidance in efficient practices from sugar millers and the state. Small farmers in the Herbert River district, contracted to supply cane to the Colonial Sugar Company, were advised which varieties to plant

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[127] *N.Q. Register*, 10 October, 1931
[128] *Ibid.,* 31 October, 1931
[129] *Ibid.,* 11 April, 1931, To the Editor, "Subsidised and Unsubsidised"
[130] *The Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol 29, 1970, p.xxii

and were required to carry out procedures such as trashing.[131] In his role as Instructor of Agriculture in the 1890s, Edward Shelton promoted "short cuts to desired ends" and was dismissive of "old country" methods[132] The Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, established in 1900, helped farmers maximise returns, through advice on agronomy and breeding new varieties of cane. The state and industry worked together from the 1920s to restrict the area of land cleared and planted to cane and the size of the annual harvest.

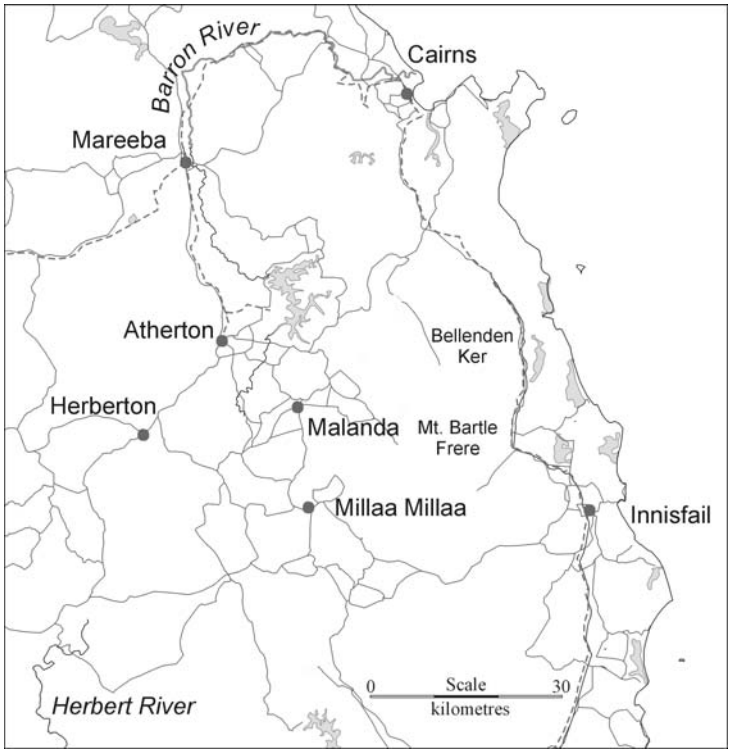
The farming discourse found in the agricultural sections of regional newspapers from 1900 to 1970 emphasised "efficiency". For example, Harry Easterby, director of Experimental Stations, told growers in Ingham in 1914 not to get carried away by the rhetoric of legislators who said everything was right with the industry. Farmers had to be prepared to get more out of the land, with more implements and less labour. He praised Herbert River growers for their "enterprise and ingenuity".[133] In 1929, Easterby's successor, Dr H. W.Kerr, told a field day attended by 400 growers at South Johnstone the bureau aimed to help them farm more efficiently and profitably, building on the generous provision of nature.[134]

Was a concept of good stewardship of the land implicit in the discourse of efficiency? A good steward would presumably have anticipated the damaging erosion reported along the Burdekin River in the 1940s, caused by the removal of vegetation from the riverbank. The farmers who formed a river trust and soil conservation committee to combat erosion seem to have seen land care as both a communal and

[131] R.C. Sugar Industry in Queensland, 1889, evidence of Neils Christian Rosendahl, 28 January, 1889, pp.108-110.
[132] Annual Report of Instructor of Agriculture, 1891, p.17.
[133] *N.Q. Register,* 5 October, 1914.
[134] *Ibid.,* 13 July, 1929

individual responsibility, in the interest of profitable farming.[135] I will examine in Chapters Four and Five whether some farmers also exercised a disinterested form of stewardship, for nature's sake.

[135] Powell, Plains of Promise, pp. 248-249, *T.D. Bulletin*, 29 November 1946. See discussion in Chapter Three, pp.123-124.



The Atherton Tableland. Source: Geoscience Australia, 1:1,000,000 scale vector data. USGS 1:1,000,000 world DEM data

Chapter 2

Dairying, cropping, fisheries and the reef

In 1918, geographer Griffith Taylor described the North Queensland plateau lands as Australia's most promising tropical area, because of their good climate, favourable rainfall, good soil and valuable mines. Conditions in the township of Atherton came closest to ideal for Europeans compared with other tropical settlements. He predicted that dairying would continue to grow in this region. These plateau lands covered 12,000 square miles (3.1 million ha) west of the coastal ranges between Townsville and Cairns, all at least 2000 feet (600m) above sea level.[1] Pastoralist John Atherton had explored and settled on the northern end of the plateau named after him in 1877.[2] Farmers followed miners into the district after the discovery of tin in the headwaters of the Herbert River in 1880. [3] Dairy farmers from Tolga, north-east of Herberton, were reported to be supplying miners with butter in 1887.[4] Settlers found themselves with large quantities of valuable timber to transport to the coast. Fifty years later, Mrs H. Halfpapp, formerly of Kulara, ruefully recalled her family's cedar-cutting:

> Huge logs were cut and drawn to the nearest creeks and floated down the Barron River and over the falls. A large number of logs were broken up in crossing the falls, while lots of those that did get to the bottom went out to sea. This method of getting

[1] Griffith Taylor, "Geographical Factors Controlling Settlement of Tropical Australia", *Queensland Geographical Journal,* 32nd-33rd sessions, 1916-1918, 1918, pp.3, 38, 55. The Atherton Tableland is on the northern end of Taylor's plateau. Land Commissioner W.T. White defined it in 1901 as the large are of volcanic land, 3000 feet above sea level, east and south-east of Herberton, comprising dense scrub and large quantities of valuable timber", *The Queensland Official Year Book,* 1901, pp.159-160.
[2] Timothy Bottoms, *Djabugay Country,* Cairns, 1999, p.36.
[3] K. Cohen, M. Cook, H. Pearce, *Heritage Trails of the Tropical North,* Brisbane, 2001, p.156. Herberton was established in 1880.
[4] R.C. on Development of North Queensland, p.75, Appendix 4.

> timber down to the coast was soon seen as a very unproductive one, besides being the cause of wholesale destruction and loss of valuable logs.[5]

Mazlin Brothers had opened the first timber mill in Atherton in 1881, to capitalise on the district's rich resources.[6]

A Crown Lands Commissioner in Herberton described the Atherton Tableland in 1897 as having a climate and soil "eminently suited to agriculture", with some scrub growing in topsoil estimated to be 60 feet (18m) deep,[7] and "millions of feet" of blue gum trees, suitable for railway sleepers.[8] By 1897, settlers had occupied 30,000ac (12,000ha) of land around Atherton, clearing cultivating and planting 2560ac (1024ha) of it with fodder crops, fruit trees and English potatoes.[9] A group of farmers, described as mostly single men, many of them ex-miners, had occupied 110 homestead blocks of 100ac to 320ac (40ac to 128ha) in the Herberton district. Chinese labourers had cleared about half the land in this area, and were farming much of it.[10] I will discuss the contribution of Chinese farmers in Chapter Four.

The state government fostered settlement by extending the railway from Cairns to Mareeba (opened in 1893), on to Atherton in 1903 and Herberton in 1910. Encouraged by surveys which predicted the volcanic soil would support a large population, the government opened up a total of 115,916ac (46,366ha) for selection from 1907 to 1910. This included 328 blocks around Atherton in 1909 and 1910 and 133 in the Herberton district. Butter factories opened in Atherton, Malanda, Ravensoe

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[5] *T.D.Bulletin,* 24 December, 1929
[6] Cohen, Heritage Trails*,* p.144.
[7] *V&P*, 1897, Report of Royal Commission on Land Settlement, p.132 (p.1049), evidence of Adam Cuppage Haldane, Crown Lands Commissioner, Herberton: "I think there is nothing to compete with this scrub. I have seen nothing like it in North Queensland and I have travelled from Bowen to Burketown and all over the district in the last 29 years."
[8] Ibid, p.38, evidence of William Bernard Kelly, farmer and storekeeper, of Atherton.
[9] *Ibid.,* p.137.
[10] *Ibid.,* pp.132-135, evidence of John Jones Byers, Crown Lands Surveyor, Herberton: "pretty well all the scrublands are planted with a hoe".

and Millaa Millaa between 1907 and 1930.[11] The government offered 356 soldier-settler blocks for ballot on 23,434ac (9373ha) of the Tolga-Kairi district in 1920.[12] Despite the farmers' efforts, the tableland still seemed to Francis Ratcliffe to be covered by jungle and eucalyptus parkland when he visited in 1929. Across the Barron River at the northern end of the district, he observed the interface of the two vegetation types, alternating "tongues of jungle enclosing open glades in which grew fine specimens of Moreton Bay ashes and flooded gums."[13]

The state had supported the dairy industry since 1894 when Premier Hugh Nelson offered a farthing a pound bonus for export butter.[14] The Margarine Act, introduced in 1910, limited margarine imports.[15] The Dairy Produce Act, first carried in 1920 and amended several times later, regulated the industry in paddock, shed and factory.[16] The Queensland Dairy Products Stabilisation Board, established in 1933, fixed home butter prices higher than export prices. The industry on the tableland was also supported by a Federal bounty on butter production, and other state government initiatives to lift milk production, which lagged behind Holland, New Zealand and the Australian average.[17] The former Country-National Party Premier, Arthur Moore, raised the possibility in 1933 that protection was encouraging dairy farming "on a class of country unsuited for the purpose."[18] His government had set up a Pasture

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[11] G. Bolton, A Thousand Miles, pp.300-301; *The Queensland Official Year Book, 1901,* pp.159-160; R.C. on Development of North Queensland, p.75, Appendix 4.
[12] *QPP* vol 1, 1920, Under-Secretary for Public Lands' report on Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts, 1917-1920, p.8 (p1108).
[13] Ratcliffe, Flying Fox, pp.59-60.
[14] John Mahon, "The Dairying Season of 1896-97", *Queensland Agricultural Journal* (1) Jan. 1986, p.16, cited by Anne Statham, *The Fight For A Fair Go*, Brisbane, 1995, p.6.
[15] P.J. Skerman, A.E. Fisher, P.L. Lloyd, *Guiding Queensland Agriculture, 1887-1987,* Brisbane, 1988, p.78.
[16] *Ibid.,* p.168; *QPD* 1932, vol clxi, p.250, 6 September, introducing the Dairy Produce Act Amendment Bill which regulated factory payments to farmers, Secretary for Agriculture Frank Bulcock said the existing Act had stimulated production and improved milk quality.
[17] Fitzgerald, From 1915, p.175, lists the Pasture Improvement Committee to encourage use of artificial grasses and improved refrigeration techniques; M. A. Jones, The Government and Economic Growth in Queensland 1930-1940, thesis, University of Queensland, 1996, p.56.
[18] *QPD* 1933, vol clxiv, p.1236, cited by M.A. Jones, p.54.

Improvement Committee in 1930 to try to deal with below-national-average milk yields.[19]

Harold Swain argued in 1931 that Atherton Tableland dairy farmers were being subsidised to compete, "from the pedestal of White Australia living standards" against farmers from Russia, Argentina and Denmark who were too poor to eat their own butter.[20] However, the commissioners, who included John Grainger Atherton, son of the pioneer, defended world-parity pricing for butter which, they said, amounted to tax paid by Australian consumers on all butter exported. This support kept the industry on an even keel and able to provide jobs on the land for some of the 30,000 boys who reached working age in Australia every year:

> To say, therefore that the Dairying Industry should not be extended would be a counsel of despair. It would mean the end of closer settlement because no farming would pay; the congregation of people in impoverished cities; and eventually the overthrow of our social order. Not by such craven policies shall Australia find the way out.[21]

Milk production from the Atherton district increased 70 per cent between 1920 and 1970-71, from 5.2 million gallons to 8.8 million, while the number of dairy farms declined, from 493 to 313.[22] However, in 1960, annual productivity of North Queensland cows was still half the yields achieved in Tasmania and Victoria, because of declining productivity of pastures and soil fertility. Economist Bruce Davidson calculated in 1960 that the total subsidy paid on butter produced in North Queensland

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[19] Statham, Fight for a Fair Go*,* p.16.
[20] Swain, Cabinetwood Forests*,* p.1.
[21] R.C. on Development of North Queensland, pp.16-17.
[22] *QPP,* 1930, vol 2, Agricultural Production 1929, p.201 (p.871); *Statistics of the State of Queensland*, 1970-71; *QPP* 1970-71, Annual Report Department of Primary Industries, p.26, records 343 registered dairies in the Malanda district, 31 May, 1971, 320 of them registered for assistance through the Dairy Pasture Subsidy Scheme, established in 1966 offering a maximum subsidy of $14 per acre for plantings of approved perennial grasses.

was 210,000 pounds per annum, and that both farm and family incomes were below state averages.[23]

Cereal crops, tobacco, orcharding

In 1901, the State Government considered 396,640ac (158,656ha) of undeveloped land in the Townsville, Ravenswood, Charters Towers and Bowen districts still suitable for selection.[24] Crown land on the coastal plains from Ingham to Port Douglas was considered too remote from settlement or shipping to be profitably exploited.[25] Farmers on the Lower Haughton River, south-east of Townsville, told an inquiry in 1916 that cane was the only crop they could grow profitably. Prices for potatoes were unpredictable and maize susceptible to blight. A witness, G. Deane, said all the land-owners in the district were growing cane, despite having to cart it some distance to the tramline to Pioneer Mill at Brandon.[26] They were also selling firewood to the mill for "very low prices".[27]

The State recognised the economic hazards of the North's sugar monoculture, identified decades earlier, and fostered diversification through tobacco schemes at Mareeba in the 1930s and Clare in the 1950s. The Moore government initiated tobacco-growing at Mareeba in 1930 by having 130ac (52ha) cleared under an unemployment relief scheme, then offering 26 blocks for selection, each of them with

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[23] B.R. Davidson, *The Northern Myth, A Study of Physical and Economic Limits to Agricultural and Pastoral Development in Tropical Australia,* Melbourne, 1965, p.137. Davidson observed that the tableland lacked suitable pasture legumes for dairying, despite intensive research.
[24] J Hughes, Registrar-General, *The Queensland Official Year Book, 1901,* Brisbane, 1901, pp.148-149, lists land available for selection and suitable for agriculture and fruit growing as "patches on the banks of the Lower Burdekin" liable to flooding, on the left bank of Majors Creek and at the foot of the coast range. It included 43,000ac (17,200ha) at Halifax, in the Lower Herbert, and 53,760ac (21,504ha) of the Inkerman expired grazing lease known as Leichhardt Downs.
[25] *Ibid.,* pp.159-160.
[26] *V&P,* 1916, Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry, 1916, p.235 (p.1095) , 26 May.
[27] *Ibid.,* p.231. Deane predicted the land would be "thick with firewood for years to come".

5ac (2ha) ready for planting.[28] The Mareeba crop expanded from 2880ac (1152ha) in 1939-40, to 9512ac (3804ha) in 1970-71.[29] The Federal Government established a 7000ac (2800ha) tobacco-growing scheme on the Burdekin River at Clare in 1948, through its post-war Rural Reconstruction Commission. The scheme failed because of problems with the soil, pests, climate, finance and marketing. Burdekin Shire historian John Kerr says it was an ill-conceived election promise, begun without adequate research, attention to marketing or regard to economic principles.[30] The government rescued landholders in 1963 by granting assignments to grow cane to 136 of the 149 irrigated farms in the scheme.[31] The tobacco crop in the Burdekin expanded from 10ac (4ha) in 1939-40, to 2099ac (839ha) in 1960, then fell away to 39ac (15ha) in 1970-71.[32]

Cairns and Cardwell banana growers lost southern markets to the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales because of World War I shipping disruptions.[33] However, fruit growing expanded with improved road and rail links to southern markets. Growers from Bowen to Cairns reported a combined area of 634ac (253ha) under bananas in 1930 and 1427ac (570ha) in 1970, almost all in the Wet Tropics, and the majority, 1196ac (478ha), in Cardwell Shire. Mango growers in the Bowen district expanded their crop from 8919 bushels in 1930 to 56,197 bushels in 1970.

Farmers Tom and John Rolfe, of Dalbeg, in the Burdekin district, began growing and milling rice in 1967, when prices were at a 10-year high. Production

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[28] *QPP*, 1931, vol 1 of 2, First Annual Report of Under-Secretary for Labour and Industry, Operations and Proceedings under Income (unemployment relief) Tax Acts of 1930, pp.17-18, (pp.61-62); *Brisbane Courier, 8* July, 1931.
[29] *Statistics of the State of Queensland,* Rockingham Division, 1970-71
[30] Kerr, Black Snow*,* p.235.
[31] *Ibid,* p.238
[32] *Statistics of the State of Queensland.*
[33] *QPD,* vol 224, 1959, 3rd session, 35th Parliament, 23 September, p.440, Lloyd Roberts, MLA for Whitsunday, in debate on Development of North Queensland: "Orchards destroyed in the Cairns area (during WWI) were replaced with cane and at Cooktown and Cardwell simply abandoned".

peaked at 12,043 tonnes in 1972. The Department of Primary Industries had begun experimental rice growing in 1953 at its Millaroo research station, in the Burdekin. Trials suggested the presence of large quantities of suitable soil in the district for flood-irrigated rice.[34]

Beef cattle were grazed on areas unsuitable for farming. Numbers in the Herbert River district increased from 19, 291 in 1900[35] to 29,727 in 1929[36] to 38,000 in 1950, then declined as more land was cleared and cultivated for cane.[37] Numbers around Ayr and Townsville increased from 56,115 head in 1929, to 65,000 head in 1967.[38] Farmers in the districts of South Johnstone and Tully depended on beef and dairy cattle, citrus fruit and bananas before establishing central sugar mills in 1915 and 1925 respectively.[39] In 1962, the State Government leased 26,000ac (10,400ha) of what Lands Minister A. R. Fletcher described as "poor-soil coastal forest" near Tully to a US company, King Ranch Developments Pty Ltd, to clear and improve for cattle grazing. The Department of Primary Industries announced plans to test 470 plant varieties in a pasture trial. The company, owned by R.J. Kleberg, junior, of Texas, had cleared 441 square kilometres by 1969 and sown 251 square kilometres with improved pasture.[40]

Irrigation schemes

[34] Kerr, pp.301-303; *QPP* 1967-68, Annual Report Department of Primary Industries, p.6 (p.1140).
[35] *QPP*, 1901, vol 4 of 4, Annual Report of the Secretary for Agriculture for 1900-1901, p.47.
[36] *QPP*, 1929, vol 2, Report of Registrar General on Agricultural Production, p228 (p844).
[37] *The Australian Sugar Yearbook*, 1950, p.293 and 1955, p.351.
[38] *QPP*, vol 2, 1929, Report on Agricultural Production, p.228 (p.844) and *T.D. Bulletin*, July 4, 1967, quoting State Minister for Primary Industries, J. A. Row.
[39] Chinese growers produced most of the 1.2 million dozen bananas shipped from Mourilyan in 1901, D. Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas,* p.249.
[40] QPD, 1st session, 37th Parliament, vol 236, 1962, Minister for Lands A.R. Fletcher, p.1147; Fitzgerald, From 1915*,* p.419. Hudson, By The Banyan*,* pp.325, 347 records that former Tully Mill director Mort Johnson leased part of the King Ranch land in the 1980s to grow bananas. Tully produced more bananas than any other district in Australia in the 1990s.

Climate and weather cycles were well recognised by 1900 as limiting factors on farming.[41] Premier and Member for Townsville, Robert Philp, told an inquiry in 1900 that his 26-year connection with the North convinced him the seasons were against agriculture around Bowen and Townsville. Bowen farmers depended on irrigation for the fruit trees, while use of the plentiful good land around Townsville was restricted by the absence of rain for seven to eight months a year.[42] An Alligator Creek grazier and dairy farmer, Thomas Marron, told the 1889 sugar inquiry he had made no return on 18 years' labour because of bad seasons. "The first 10 years I was here we had good seasons, but they have been falling off ever since," he said. He added that he and his neighbours needed government assistance on account of the seasonal unpredictability of rain.[43]

The Kemp Report, issued in 1951, envisaged that the Burdekin Dam would water 3640 new farms, 42 per cent of them specialising in tobacco, generate hydro electricity worth two million pounds a year and bring 50,000 more people to the Lower Burdekin. The dam, with a catchment of 44,000 square miles (114,000 sq km), would store 6.5 million acre feet (8 million megalitres) of water. Kemp believed, in the tradition of the Royal Commissioners who investigated development in the North 20 years earlier, that the scheme would contribute to the defence of Australia, "by increasing the population and productivity of the State, particularly of North Queensland".[44]

The State Government endorsed a staged development, beginning with

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[41] J.M. Powell, *Griffith Taylor and Australia Unimited,* Brisbane, 1993. [PG no on Dale]
[42] *V&P* Vol 3, 1900, Royal Commission on Railway Extension to Bowen, p.736, evidence of Robert Philp, MLA. Setlers had cleared and cultivated land for fodder, fruit and vegetables from the earliest days of the Bowen district. Farmers, Gideon Pott and Feredrick Hildebrand told the commissioners they had been living on the Don River for 33 years and 30 years, respectively. (pp. 584-5)
[43] R.C. Sugar Industry in Queensland, 1889, p.160 (p.254), evidence of Thomas Marron.
[44]Powell, Plains of Promise, pp.240-244, quoting from Report by the Burdekin River Authority on the Burdekin River Irrigation, Hydro-Electric and Flood Mitigation project, December 1951.

construction of a small weir to serve the Clare soldier settlers and development of irrigation areas beside the river at Millaroo and Dalbeg. About 200 farms were drawing water from the scheme by 1955.[45] The government could not afford the second stage, including the main dam,[46] without Commonwealth assistance. However, it approved construction of the Tinaroo Falls Dam in 1953, to irrigate 1000 farms in the Mareeba-Dimbulah area on the northern edge of the Atherton Tableland.[47]

Burdekin dam supporters formed committees in Ayr and Townsville in 1960 and lobbied until 1983, when the Federal Government agreed to build a dam capable of storing 1.75 megalitres, and opening 100,000ha (254,000ac) for sugar and rice growing, but without a hydro power station. The dam was opened in 1988, with its storage in a lake named after George Dalrymple connected to Townsville-Thuringowa's water supply in 1988-89.[48] Supporters argued the dam would assist graziers in the Lower Burdekin, produce cheap electricity and perhaps stimulate cotton-growing. Ernest Ford, the chairman of the Burdekin Dam Committee, formed in Ayr in 1960, saw prospects for fattening and slaughtering for export 300,000 to 400,000 cattle a year, from irrigated pastures. He conceded that markets for the district's other products were saturated.[49] The New State for North Queensland Movement, launched in 1955,[50] decided that large States were holding up irrigation schemes which did not have "interstate connections". *The Home Hill Observer* argued

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[45] *QPP*, vol 2 of 2, 1955, Fifth Annual Report of the Burdekin River Authority, p.5 (p.649). The first stage also included provision for research at the Ayr Regional Experiment Station, Clare Tobacco Station and Millaroo Regional Experiment Station. Trials were under way in 1954-55 on suitable grazing pastures and comparing varieties of sugar cane, oats, wheat, linseed, cotton, maize, sunflowers and legumes.
[46] Fitzgerald, From 1915, pp.211-12, f56
[47] *T.D. Bulletin*, 5 October, 1959, the dam, with storage capacity of 90,000 million gallons and irrigation scheme were opened at a cost of 20 million pounds in 1959
[48] Kerr, Black Snow, pp.296-298.
[49] *The Home Hill Observer,* 15 January, 1960
[50] *Ibid.,* 23 August, 1957

that the creation of "four or five fresh governments" would hasten the harnessing of the great potential of rivers such as the Burdekin and the Clarence in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales.[51] The rationale of the secession movement was that a new northern state would expedite development, improve transport and communication links, improve democracy by bringing government closer to the people and make the North more secure from attack.[52]

The Reef and fishing

Dr William Saville-Kent, Queensland's first Commissioner of Fisheries, saw the Great Barrier reef as a "vast harvest field", with exports of pearls, pearl shell, beche-de-mer, trochus shell and guano worth 100,000 pounds a year in 1890-91. Japanese operators dominated pearl shell and sea slug harvesting on the north coast. A fleet of about 100 beche-de-mer boats worked around Thursday Island and Cooktown in 1889.[53] Queensland exported 2085 tons of beche-de-mer, made from dried and smoked sea slugs and sea cucumbers, from 1880 to 1889, mostly to China.[54] A total of 354 boats employing more than 2000 labourers were reported to be harvesting pearl shells at Thursday Island in 1901.[55] By 1953, the industry had declined to 86 boats employing 918 men, harvesting 495t of pearl-shell and 995t of trochus-shell.[56]

Queensland's fisheries were described in optimistically in 1901 as distinctly good, with "immense shoals" of Grey Mullet and Whiting. Moreton Bay was reported

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[51] *Ibid.,* 20 September, 1957
[52] *Ibid.,* 23 August, 1957, from a petition to the Parliament of Queensland: "The New State would thereby ensure a more even distribution of population and industry over the entire fertile area of the Commonwealth, thus making it generally more defensible, increasing its prosperity, and decreasing the provocation it offers to crowded northern countries by its undeveloped and under-populated areas."
[53] Bowen, Great Barrier Reef p.156.
[54] *V&P*, 1890-91, volII, W. Saville-Kent, Beche-de-Mer and Pearl Shell Fisheries of Northern Queensland, p.6.
[55] J. Hughes, Registrar-General, *Queensland Official Year Book,* Brisbane, 1901, p.299.
[56] *QPP*, 1953-54, vol 1 of 2, Report of Department of Harbours and Marine for year ended 30 June, 1953, p.20.

to have a fishing fleet of 100 boats at this time.[57] J Douglas Ogilby, a former assistant in zoology at the Australian Museum, promoted the potential of finned fish in his essay *The Commercial Fishes and Fisheries of Queensland,* published in 1916. Writing before the advent of fishing on outer reefs, Ogilby estimated there were 1200 species of fish in Queensland waters, one-quarter of them edible and destined to be exploited by "more practical and scientific methods" than those in vogue in 1916.[58] Professor Ernest James Goddard, head of biology at the University of Queensland, chided Australians in 1927 for not capitalising on the resources of the reef. He suggested that "useless fish" could be turned into fertiliser, following the South African example.[59] He had taught zoology in South Africa before his appointment as Professor of Biology at the University of Queensland in 1922. He also advocated establishment of a university marine research station at Thursday Island, Townsville or Dunk Island.[60]

Chinese fishermen appear to have been active in the North in the 1870s and 1880s, especially in the cooler months. In 1889, they were reported to be keeping Townsville supplied with fish, "to a certain extent". [61] By 1931, Townsville had a commercial fishing fleet of 72 boats employing 153 licensed fishermen. The fleet grew to 404 boats and 1059 licensed fishermen in 1953, but had declined to 267 boats, with 324 fishermen in 1969.[62] By the 1950s, a mackerel fleet of up 63 boats caught an

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[57] *Queensland Official Yearbook,* 1901, Brisbane, 1901, p.298.
[58] J Douglas Ogilby, *The Commercial Fishes and Fisheries of Queensland*, first published 1916, revised and illustrated by Tom C Marshall, Brisbane, 1954, p.1 and footnote p.89. He predicted the fishery would prove a permanent asset, demanding no outlay for its upkeep, "…which with bounteous hand is ever engaged in filling up the gaps made in its ranks by the pitiless ravages of man, and which is wholly unaffected by flood or drought, by internal or external convulsion."
[59] *N.Q. Register*, 15 August, 1927; Bowen, Great Barrier Reef, pp. 250-251.
[60] Bowen, Great Barrier Reef*,* p.251.
[61] *QPD*, 1877, vol XXIV, 4th sess, 7th Pmt, 30 October, 1877, p.1480, pp.1494-1496; *The Townsville Herald,* 16 February, 19889, p.12.
[62] *QPP*, 1931, vol 1 of 2, Report of the Department of Harbours and Marine, year ended 30 June 1931, p.155; *QPP,* 1953-54, vol 1 of 2, Report of Department of Harbours and Marine,

average of 500,000 pounds of mackerel annually off Townsville.[63] The North Queensland Fish Board received 460,742 pounds of fish in 1969-70, including 18,657 pounds of Barramundi.[64] I will discuss in chapter three government attempts to regulate the industry, which Treasurer Thomas Hiley conceded in 1960 was far from rich in world terms.[65]

Conclusions

Governments protected the dairy and tobacco industries and planned to build the Burdekin irrigation scheme because they believed in the uplifting qualities of life on the land, as well as wanting to defend White Australia. The develop-the-North, use-it-or-lose it discourse lasted into the 1960s, despite a few dissenting voices. Ernest Goddard told a meeting of Townsville Rotarians in 1927 he considered development of the North had been too haphazard and advocated a scientific survey of its salient features. He said he was attracted to the "romance" of the region and believed this would drive its settlement and development. A reporter from *The North Queensland Register* explained:

> What he meant by the romantic aspect was that which impelled a man to go further and still further acting in the knowledge that there is something at the other end of the journey to make it worthwhile.[66]

A visiting hydro-electric engineer, Mr J. Morris, told members of the Bowen

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year ended 30 June, 1953, p.20; *QPP*, 1970-71,Queensland Department of Primary Industries, annual report, 1969-70, p.45 (p.1299)

[63] Keith Bryson, of White Lady Bay, Magnetic Island, interview with Ian Frazer, 10 November, 2002; Keith Bryson, telephone conversation with Ian Frazer, 18 July, 2003; J. and M. Bowen, *The Great Barrier Reef,* p. 335.

[64] *QPP,* Session of 1969-70, p. 945, Fourth Annual Report of the North Queensland Fish Board.

[65] *QPD.,* vol 225, 3rd sess, 35th Pmt, 1960, 1 December, p.1748.

[66] *N.Q Register*, 22 August, 1927. Professor Goddard (1883-1948), a zoologist, became Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Queensland in 1927. He was also a foundation member of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (E.Clarke, "Goddard, Ernest James", *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* vol.7: 1991-1939, Melbourne, pp. 36-37).

Chamber of Commerce in 1939 they should consider taking in up to 300,000 Jewish migrants from Germany to grow ramie, a fibre used in sails and clothing. He believed the district could support this number of Jews within a 60 mile (100km) radius of Bowen, and warned that North Australia was vulnerable because of its small population.[67] Champions of the North believed the deployment of 100,000 soldiers to the Atherton Tableland alone during World War II proved the region could support a much larger population. Federal Member for Leichhardt, Henry Bruce, suggested an extra 5 million people.[68]

Tom Aikens, the North Queensland Labor Party MLA for Mundingburra, ran a "square go for the North" campaign in 1947, arguing for the harnessing of the Burdekin to bring thousands of fertile acres into production.[69] He advocated cotton-growing to turn the Burdekin district into "the Dixieland of Queensland".[70] Dr Peter Delamoth, of Bowen, president of the North Queensland Local Authorities Association, expressed concern in 1950 about the declining population of Cook Shire on the Cape, from 2068 in 1933, to 1135 in 1947. He feared the North's empty spaces could encourage an unfriendly neighbour to attack, in the absence of population, industry and properly formed roads.[71] Tom Gilmore, Country Party MLA for Tablelands, told Parliament in 1959 Australia had a moral responsibility to develop the North. "If we are not prepared to do it, we have no right to hold it," he said, arguing for cotton and tobacco industries on the base of the Cape.[72] In 1961, the chairman of the Commonwealth Banking Corporation, Warren McDonald, advocated

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[67] *N.Q. Register,* 3 April, 1939.
[68] *CofA Hansard,* House of Representatives, 21 June, 1951, p.266.
[69] *T.D. Bulletin,* 10 April, 1947.
[70] *QPD,* 1st session, 35th Parliament, 1957-58, p.1129, 19 November, 1957,supply debate.
[71] *T.D.Bulletin,* 10 October, 1950.
[72] *Ibid.,* 2 October, 1959, report of debate on a motion in State Parliament by Lloyd Roberts, Country Party MLA for Whitsunday, calling for North Queensland to be "developed, expanded and populated as a matter of extreme urgency" (QPD, vol 224, 3rd session, 35th Parliament, 1959, p.435, 24 September)

that the Snowy Mountains Authority develop the "vulnerable, sparsely populated North".[73]

The Townsville Daily Bulletin argued that the North must aim for a population of five to 10 million to take produce from the Lower Burdekin, the Atherton Tableland and country west of Herveys Range, to avoid perennial gluts and collapses.[74] The *North Queensland Herald* had put a similar case in 1895, when the North faced a glut of butter, maize and potatoes, despite drought, insisting that "a large increase in population seems the only radical cure for the over-supply of food the colony is suffering.".[75]

Sceptics replied with utilitarian, economic arguments. Crops without markets were simply unprofitable in the analysis of Bruce Davidson, and worse if protected by government subsidies. He challenged cushioning of the sugar industry, which he estimated had cost the Federal Government 13.6 million pounds in tropical areas in 1960 and questioned research into crops for the tropics which ignored economic costs. Dry land farming was more cost-effective than irrigation, he argued. Labour, fertiliser and machinery were being wasted on clearing the North for unprofitable crops.[76]

William Lickiss, Liberal Party MLA for Mount Coot-tha and a future Minister for Urban and Regional Affairs, challenged "the wild cry, Develop the North", two years before publication of *The Northern Myth.* He used his maiden speech in 1963 to reject development as a form of defence and security. Not farmers, but trained soldiers with appropriate weapons stopped invaders, he said. The development of intensive cultivation with maximum labour could attract envy from northern neighbours who

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[73] *Ibid.,* 11 March, 1961.
[74] *T.D. Bulletin,* 24 March, 1961, editorial, "Lower Burdekin possession ability to grow crops but cannot supply market".
[75] *N.Q.Herald,* 3 April, 1895.
[76] Davidson, Northern Myth*,* Melbourne, 1965, pp.269-70; and Davidson, Australia Wet or Dry.

managed such enterprises best. Australians should persevere with their strength, in cultivating and grassing large acreages in poor and dry lands, and share this knowledge with Asian neighbours. Lickiss believed the most acceptable reason for developing the North would be to maximise the potential of land resources and raise standards of living in a ripple through Australia and around the world. Producing for the sake of producing was a shoddy policy which had hurt tobacco growers and undermined national well-being. He rejected the Burdekin irrigation scheme, claiming soils below the proposed dam were impermeable and unsuitable for irrigated crops. Lack of soil fertility, not water, was Queensland's problem north of the Tropic of Capricorn.[77]

Griffith Taylor had put forward a similar argument against close white settlement of tropical Australia 45 years earlier. He estimated in 1918 that tropical Australia, that is the 1.49 million square miles (3.8 million sq km) north of the Tropic of Capricorn, could support a maximum population of 1.4 million, but that would take at least a century and "much more advanced cultivation and grazing methods than have hitherto been necessary to secure satisfactory returns."[78]

A correspondent to *The Johnstone River Advocate* in 1936 reflected on anxiety over the demise of grazing properties on the Gulf and reminded readers of hundreds of thousands of acres of abandoned wheat farms in southern States and Western Australia, scarified by grasshoppers, emus and rabbits. The solution to regaining prosperity and happiness, in his opinion, might be found in electing a progressive government, to "solve the problems of agriculture, and alleviate the poverty and distress that exists among farming people."[79] I will examine in Chapter Three, the

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[77] *QPD,* 1st session, 37th Parliament, 1963-64, pp.36-38, 22 August, 1963, maiden speech by William Lickiss.
[78] Taylor, Settlement of Tropical Australia, p.67
[79] *The Johnstone River Advocate,* 11 June, 1936, p.3, letter from J. Wells, Innisfail.

ways that governments translated “problems” into rules, regulations and strategies which variously recognised limits to the use of natural resources.

Chapter 3

Legal and moral sanctions

Laws enacted between 1870 and 1970 to protect the natural resources of North Queensland were, as Geoff Mosley observed in 1972, minor and piecemeal.[1] Governments' efforts to save orchids, beche-de-mer and pearl oysters from depletion and halt the slaughter of possums and koalas for their skins seem to have been due more to the persistence of lobbyists than to clear conservation policies. Nevertheless, legislators tried to ameliorate damage to certain tokens of nature, especially as tourism increased after World War II.

Their arguments for a proscriptive approach to stewardship can be found in proceedings of the Macalister Government's Select Committee on Forestry Conservation in 1875 and in debates over laws such as the Douglas Government's Native Bird Destruction Act of 1877, and the Theodore Government's Act to Protect Animals and Birds of 1921. These and other debates, both in Parliament and the Press, hint at the difficulty of legislating for limits on exploitation of Queensland's "natural source of wealth" – its forests, soils and climate[2]. Soil conservation laws enacted in the 1950s represent tentative steps towards proscribing harmful farming practices. Aesthetic, utilitarian, nationalistic and ecological arguments for restraint appeared sporadically between 1870 and 1970.

The colonial botanist, Walter Hill, recommended the preservation of some shade and timber trees after accompanying George Dalrymple on his expedition from Cardwell to the Endeavour River, in 1873. Hill wrote that he had never seen larger or

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[1] J.G.Mosley, "Towards a History of Conservation in Australia", in Amos Rapoport (ed.) *Australia as Human Setting,* Sydney,1972, p.153

[2] *V&P,* 1875-76, vol. 1, Forest Conervancy Report, pp.6-7, John Jardine, "Conservation of Forests, Queensland", in *V&P*, 1875-76.

finer specimens of *Calophyllum Inophyllum. L* (Beauty Leaf), *Terminalia melanocarpa, F.M, Hernandia origera, L,* and *Eugenia grandis, F.M* than those on Dunk Island, and that the government should insist on their preservation if the island was ever sold.[3] He also advocated a timber reserve to protect Kauri pines on a tributary of the Russell River from extermination,[4] and acclimatisation reserves on Fitzroy Island for Angora goats and deer and on Brook's Island for game birds.[5]

Some plantation owners cleared all vegetation from proposed homestead sites, then planted palm trees, "to give their fields a tropical appearance", Hill noted in 1873. He hoped palms supplied through his department would compensate for the "loss of grace and adornment" of native shade trees.[6] In his 1876 report he complained that South Sea Islanders were destroying Macadamia nut trees and that the *Cycas media,* a source of flour for Aborigines, was threatened by "wholesale destruction" between Port Denison and Cooktown.[7]

Lobbying by the Queensland Acclimatisation Society prompted the Macalister government to appoint a select committee in 1875 to "consider and report on the best means … to promote the growth of timber trees" and to conserve forests for useful purposes.[8] The acclimatisation society's concerns have a late twentieth century flavour. Vice-president Lewis Bernays, who was also clerk of the Legislative Assembly, wrote to the Premier, Arthur Palmer, in 1870, seeking an annual inventory of clearing in the colony to help decide whether loss of tree cover caused climate change. Bernays, grandson of English hydrographer Aaron Arrowsmith, an amateur

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[3] Dalrymple, North East Coast Expedition, pp.8-11; Walter Hill's report, p.48.
[4] *Ibid.,* p.50
[5] *Ibid.,* p.52
[6] *V&P*, 1873, Report of Walter Hill, Colonial Botanist (p.1323)
[7] *V&P* 1876, Report of Walter Hill, Colonial Botanist, p.986
[8] *V&P*, 1875-76, Vol. I, 1875, Forest Conservancy Report, p.2, (p.1223); The society was founded in Brisbane in 1862 (D.A. Herbert, "The Brisbane Botanic Gardens", *The Queensland Naturalist,* vol..XIV, no.4, July, 1952, p.72).

botanist and Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, wanted to correlate the rate of clearing with rainfall figures to test whether clearing had reduced rainfall and stopped some streams flowing.[9] He was supported by the Government Meteorological Observer, Edmund MacDonell, who warned in 1869 of likely "injurious effects" on climate of reckless destruction of forest trees.[10]

Bernays' concerns in his correspondence with government officials from 1870 to 1873 were ecological in the sense that they revealed an understanding of interconnections between humans and nature and the likely impact of "large bodies of settlers" on a naturally dry land. He anticipated the need for forest conservancy regulations to prevent detrimental climatic changes.[11] Such changes would affect the "material progress of the colony".[12]

The acclimatisation society was undeterred by the government's refusal to collect clearing statistics and two years later invited the Premier to a public meeting on forest preservation by "wise regulations". John Jardine, Rockhampton's police magistrate, restated the Bernays' contention that clearing caused "atmospheric changes" and listed other reasons to stop what he described as the indiscriminate destruction of the forest trees of Queensland. However, he also put up an aesthetic argument for reafforestation, asserting that the colony's "viewless Downs" and "shadeless" flats needed replanting to produce "freshness, verdue and cool-shade forest clumps" and give the landscape "chase-like and sylvan beauty of the Old

[9] Lewis A. Bernays to A.H. Palmer, Colonial Secretary, 13 October, 1870, in *V&P,* 1875-76, vol..I, Forest Conservancy.
[10] *V&P,* 1880, Report of the Government Meteorological Observer, 1879, p.2. (p.1487). MacDonnell quoted from his 1869 report, and said the destruction of trees was continuing, which "must result in the loss of the most valuable timber in the colony".
[11] Lewis A. Bernays to A.H. Palmer, Esq, Brisbane, 13 October, 1870, in *V&P*, 1875-1876, Vol.I, Forest Conservancy, p.3 (p.1209).
[12] L.Bernays to the Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 4 January, 1871, in *V&P*, 1875-76, p.1210.

Country."[13] The former American diplomat and nature writer George Perkins Marsh had warned in 1864 that the balance of nature had already been upset by felled forests.[14] He recommended studies such as that proposed by Bernays, to determine the effects of "great works of rural improvement" on temperatures and rainfall. He considered Australians to be well placed to make such observations, having the "necessary wealth for procuring means of instrument observation and the leisure required for the pursuit of scientific research".[15] But Bernays' colleague, the Queensland Registrar-General, Henry Scott, had neither the time nor staff to compile clearing statistics. Scott suggested Bernays should try accounting for every person holding a timber licence, or who, "even on his own ground" cut down a tree for timber or firewood.[16]

The select committee conceded in its report that there had been a "shameful" waste of valuable timber in Queensland which if unchecked could reduce supplies to the domestic and export markets. However, it made no comment on the acclimatisation society's suggested link between clearing and climate change. The committee recommended curbs on exports of log timbers, restrictions on logging of forestry reserves, and appointment of forest rangers and a Forest Conservancy Board, none of which had eventuated by 1884, when the government introduced licence fees for timber-getters.[17] Bernays continued lobbying for management and preservation of

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[13] John Jardine, "Conservation of Forests, Queensland", in *V&P*, 1875-76, vol.I, Forest Conservancy, p.10 (p.1216)
[14] Marsh, Man and Nature, p.280.
[15] *Ibid.,* p.49
[16] Henry Scott to the Colonial Secretary, 20 October, 1870, in *V&P,* 1875-76, Vol..I, Forest Conservancy, p.4 (p.1210). The government issued 12 month licences to timber-getters to work in designated areas.
[17] Forest Conservancy Report, p.4 (p.1223); R.C. on Development of North Queensland, 1931, p.76 (p.330), Appendix V, "Early Forest Practice in Queensland", notes that up to The Crown Lands Act of 1884, when the licence fees were introduced, governments "allowed the natural product of the Crown estate to be utilised as needed", without attempting to profit from logging. A royalty on timber introduced in 1884 was discontinued in 1888, in response to adverse public opinion.

Queensland forests, arguing in 1880 for establishment of a forestry department to regulate the felling of timber. He mentioned that talk about conservation of timber was pointless until the government appointed officers to regulate felling of natural timbers and to create and preserve timber reserves.[18]

Concerns at the cost of upsetting the balance of nature can be found in debate on Bills intended to manage the slaughter of native birds and animals: the Native Birds Bill of 1871 and Native Bird Protection Bill of 1877.[19] The architects of the 1871 Bill sought to strengthen the existing Game Act to outlaw hunting of certain birds during their breeding seasons. They intended to build up species deemed fit for human food and protect others not regarded as game but still regarded as "ornamental and useful".[20] A former Premier, Charles Lilley, included indigenous people in the equation, arguing that they must be guaranteed the right to hunt native birds and that they needed legislative protection too, to prevent their destruction. Stringent measures were needed to prevent the "great waste" of the colony's indigenous products, including birds which helped agriculturists by destroying insect pests.[21]

The 1877 Native Bird Protection Bill was intended, like its predecessor, to protect two categories of birds: those prized as food and those considered useful in destroying insects and reptiles in the south-east corner of the colony. The Bill was introduced by the MLA for Carnarvon, John de Poix Tyrel, who expressed alarm at the near extermination of native birds in these districts.[22] Debate dealt with the merits of various birds as farmers' friends and foes, the impact of wild cats in the East and

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[18] *V&P* 1881, L. A. Bernays, Economic Tropical Horticulture in Northern Australia, p.4 (p. 1243)
[19] *QPD* 1871-1872, vol. 13, 28 December, for second reading of Native Birds Bill; *QPD* 1877, vol. 23, 19 July, pp571-573 and 2 August, pp.704-710, for Native Bird Protection Bill.
[20] *QPD* 1871-1872, vol. 13, p.369. The Bill was introduced by MLA for Warwick, Charles Clark.
[21] *Ibid.,* Charles Lilley, MLA Fortitude Valley was Premier from 1868 to 1870.
[22] *QPD*, 1877, vol. 23, 19 July, p.571.

West Moreton districts and fears that the law was a stealthy attempt to set aside game for a privileged few. Speakers seem to have been aware that settlement had upset the food chain and held out that, perhaps, legislation might redress the balance. However, they disagreed over the effectiveness of various predators. Did kookaburras really kill snakes? Did butcherbirds deserve protection when they known to destroy poultry? The MLA for Port Curtis and another former Premier, Arthur Palmer, argued that small birds "did a vast deal of good" for farmers as proved by the disastrous destruction of native birds in France and some parts of England. His colleague George Grimes, MLA for Bullimba, saw the proposed restrictions as a "monstrous injustice" to settlers, since they posed a serious interference to their pursuits.[23]

Legislators do not appear to have investigated the causes of a plague of kangaroos and wallabies, also in 1877, described by MLA for Warrego, William Henry Walsh, as "one of the most extraordinary afflictions that had ever befallen this, or any other colony".[24] The Marsupials Destruction Bill of 1877 proposed a bounty system, financed by a levy on stock owners, and required landholders to fence out scrub regarded as harbour. The Premier and MLA for Maryborough, John Douglas, predicted it would take years to rid the colony of "the malady", which he likened to Tasmania's struggle with rabbits.[25]

In 1921, the Secretary for Agriculture, Neal Gillies, used ethical and ecological arguments to justify extending the number of protected species. Mr Gillies, a farmer and commission agent before becoming MLA for the Atherton Tableland electorate of Eacham, thanked Alec Chisholm, of the Gould Bird Lovers' League, for

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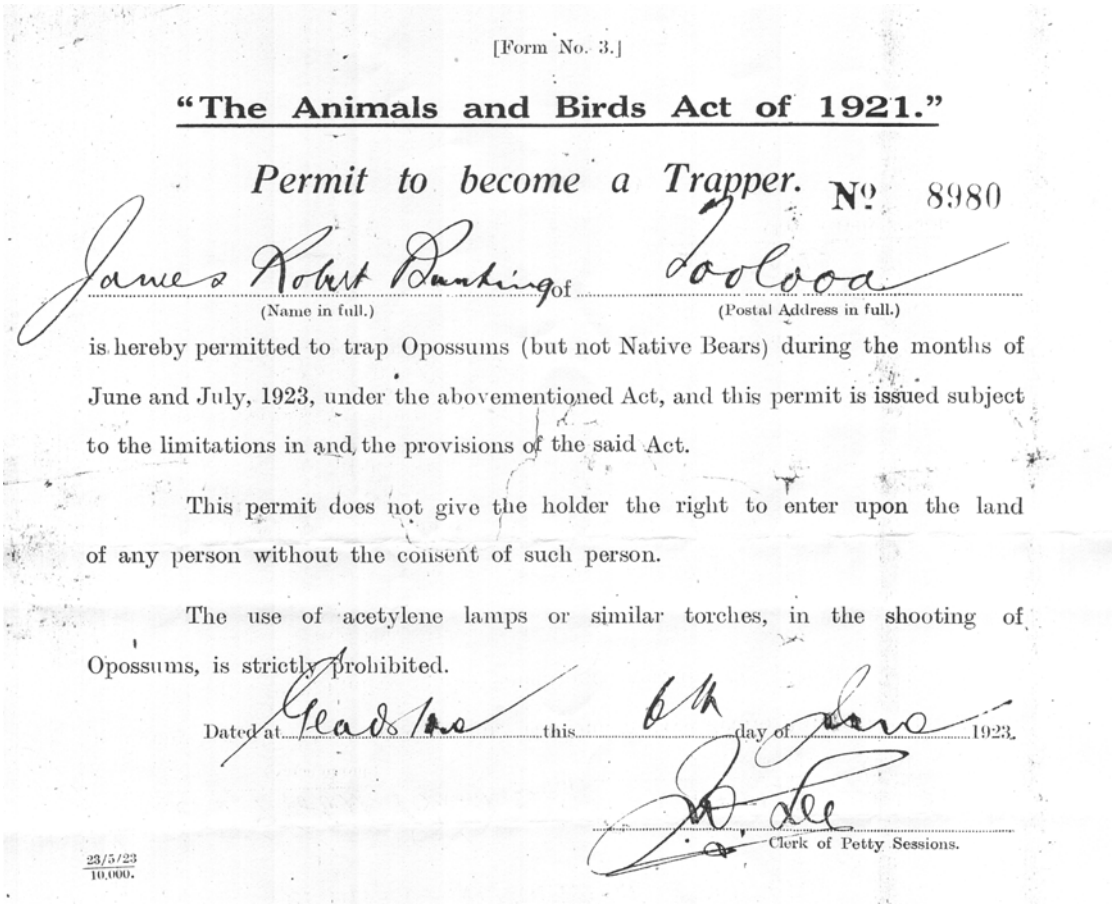
[23] *Ibid.,* p.705.
[24] *QPD*, 1877, vol..24, 30 October, p.1469. Walsh asserted that marsupials were ruining "thousands of miles" of valuable land, destroying crops and driving Crown tenants and farmers off their land and undermining property values. Bounties were to be paid on the scalps of paddamelons, wallabies, wallaroos and kangaroos.
[25] *Ibid.,* pp.1470-1471.

persuading the Premier to update the poorly policed old laws.[26] Some birds and animals were worth protecting because of their rarity, he said. He admitted to sharing a little of the bird-lover's "sentimental point of view", combined with the belief that "we cannot go on breaking the laws of nature without paying the penalty". This applied to the waste of timber and useful birds and animals. One million koalas and three million possums had been killed for their pelts in 1918-1919, and another two-and-a-half million possums killed in 1919-1920.[27] Quoting Chisholm, Gillies argued that destruction of bird and animal life had upset the balance of nature and could cause a proliferation of pests.[28] He stopped the slaughter of koalas and possums, but the government of William McCormack declared another open season in 1927, to give rural workers an extra source of income. The *Brisbane Courier* led a campaign against the killing which the government halted after the deaths of 1,014,632 possums and 584,738 koalas.[29] A correspondent to *The Capricornian* in Rockhampton welcomed McCormack's intervention in October 1927, asserting that the episode had filled "self-respecting" Queenslanders with shame. "Little Teddy and the 'possum are good Australians and they need friends," the correspondent wrote.[30] However, the convenor of the Brisbane Naturalists Club Possum Committee, George H.Baker, conceded that there was complexity in the ebbs and flows of possum populations, and advocated trapping in some districts to prevent farming losses and to help the fur industry.[31] Mackay district farmer and council health inspector Charles Edward Ford, a member of the Wildlife Preservation of Society of Australia, wrote to the *Mackay Daily Mercury* in 1927 that the life of a genuine bushman was "closely allied to all the

[26] *QPD*, 1921, vol.. 37, 2 September, pp. 472-473, and *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* vol. 9, 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1983, p.11.
[27] *QPD*, 1921, September 9, pp.657-658.
[28] *Ibid.,* p.659.
[29] Fitzgerald, From 1915 to the Early 1980s, p.77.
[30] *The Capricornian,* 6 October, 1927.
[31] *N.Q.Register,* 13 July, 1927.

animals" and that he would never destroy any animal uselessly. Ford campaigned in 1935 for greater protection for birds which he said were essential to the existence of the human race.[32]



[Form No. 3.]

"The Animals and Birds Act of 1921."

Permit to become a Trapper. No. 8980

James Robert Dunking of Toolooa
(Name in full.) (Postal Address in full.)

is hereby permitted to trap Opossums (but not Native Bears) during the months of June and July, 1923, under the abovementioned Act, and this permit is issued subject to the limitations in and the provisions of the said Act.

This permit does not give the holder the right to enter upon the land of any person without the consent of such person.

The use of acetylene lamps or similar torches, in the shooting of Opossums, is strictly prohibited.

Dated at Gladstone this 6th day of June 1923.

Clerk of Petty Sessions.

23/5/23
10,000.

In 1935, the Queensland Canegrowers' Council argued that destruction of birdlife threatened havoc in agriculture throughout the State. The council asked mill suppliers' committees to find executive members willing to become honorary rangers to police the existing regulations.[33] The Forgan Smith Government responded in 1937 with the Fauna Protection Act, which strengthened policing and penalties and gave national parks and state forests the status of wildlife sanctuaries. Debating the Bill,

[32] Lyall Ford, *Poorhouse to Paradise,* Freshwater, 2001, pp.101-103, citing *Daily Mercury,* 29 October, 1927, and 18 March, 1935.
[33] *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 7 January, 1936.

speakers recognised the economic value of birds such as the ibis, and championed the koala as unique, lovable and endangered species. Former Moore Government Minister for Agriculture, William Deacon, of Allora, considered the Act was too late, since koalas had already vanished from southern Queensland.[34] Frank Nicklin, MLA for Murrumba, argued that protection was needed to restore the balance of nature. Man had killed birds directly with firearms, and indirectly by destroying their food and introducing predators: "Had we not such a shortage of some kinds of birds we should not have had to contend with such menaces as the grasshopper plagues, the ravages of the cane grub and other insect pests."[35]

Birdlife in the Innisfail district was reported to have increased after canegrowers groups' from the district's then four mill areas nominated members to be appointed honorary rangers. "Certain members" of the Goondi Cane Pest Fund had been appointed, the fund reported in 1931. "Notices have been posted on farms prohibiting shooting on these holdings, and this has led to the birdlife of the area developing considerably in the district." A spokesman for the fund said cane pests were being destroyed "by a more economical means than we could otherwise bring about".[36] An Innisfail district canegrower wrote to *The Innisfail Evening Advocate* in 1950, observing an increase in birdlife, thanks to sanctuaries and penalties deterring "certain foreigners" from "decimating ornithological specimens".[37]

Fourteen Ingham district farmers agreed to become honorary bird protectors in 1930, in response to what *The Townsville Daily Bulletin's* correspondent described as "the serious diminution in recent years of the number of insectivorous birds in this

[34] *QPD*, 1937, 3rd sess, 27th Pmt, vol.. 171, October 27, pp.1073-1077.
[35] *QPD*, 1937, October 28, p1076. The new law was to be enforced by a network of police officers, public servants and private citizens, appointed as honorary rangers. There appear to have been 600 honorary rangers in 1937.
[36] *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 11 July, 1931.
[37] *Innisfail Evening Advocate*, 10 January, 1950.

district". They were recommended for appointment after a meeting of the Herbert River Farmers League with representatives of Hinchinbrook Shire Council and Ingham Chamber of Commerce.[38] The Queensland Canegrowers' Council contacted all district executives and mill suppliers committees in 1936, suggesting executives and committee members should become honorary rangers.[39]

However, some landholders opposed wildlife sanctuaries as an infringement of their freedom to hunt. In 1936, Cardwell Shire Council protested against the proclamation of a 5055 square mile native bird and animal sanctuary, protecting the habitat, from Hinchinbrook to Woothakata shires. Councillor Mackay said that the ibis, the cane-farmers' friend, was "never seen" in the shire and therefore would not benefit from the sanctuary. Councillor Hort feared he would be prevented from carrying a gun and shooting wallabies: "Bless my life, it is the only recreation we have,'' he said.[40] Councillors regarded as impractical bans on killing scrub turkeys and flying foxes. Scrub turkeys played havoc with cane and flying foxes' camps were unhealthy, they argued. Councillors were also suspicious of the national park status granted to Wheeler, Coombe, Smith, Bowden, Hudson and Gould islands and the Brook Group. Councillor Brice Henry said there were even more rules in National Parks than sanctuaries. "They can object to cutting tent poles in a National Park," he complained.[41] Hinchinbrook Shire Council protested against the proclamation of the sanctuary too, and was not convinced by the Department of Agriculture's assurance that landholders could still kill animals and birds to protect their crops. The council

[38] *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 November, 1930, Ingham Notes. Thirteen farmers names are given: Messrs, L Nazzari, Victoria Estate, H.E. Hollins, Fairford, B.A. Lynn, Gairloch, E.L.Burke, Long Pocket, S.Marano, Stone River, H. Gillis, Upper Stone, H.C.Heard, Toonbanna, C. Francis, Halifax, R. Blackburn, Macknade, G. Geeson, Ripple Creek, F. Russo, North Gairloch, G Cantamessa, Tara, R. Russo, Tara.
[39] *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 7 January, 1936.
[40] *N.Q.Register*, 22 February, 1936, Tully Notes.
[41] *T.D. Bulletin*, 23 May, 1936.

complained that a ban on laying poisons in the sanctuary would interfere with pest-destruction board drives to kill rats.[42]

Council debates over proscriptive forms of conservation as reported in 1936 by *The North Queensland Register* and *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, suggest that farmers regarded the existing wildlife protection laws as intrusive, paternalistic and perhaps a slur on their commonsense. Councillor Parmeter of Cardwell Shire Council considered the bird-protection law had been introduced only to stop "unscrupulous persons", such as Italians, from shooting cassowaries. Fair-minded farmers, he implied, were not unscrupulous.[43]

The Gair Government's Fauna Conservation Bill in 1952 aimed to give permanent protection to the koala, platypus and echidna and to increase the power of honorary rangers.[44] During debate the Country Party MLA for Aubigny, Walter Sparkes, revealed that he spared birds on his property. He and his sons did not poison grasshoppers in case they killed an ibis. "I am a great believer in the balance of nature," he said.[45]

Protecting the fishery

Justin Fox Greenlaw Foxton, MLA for Carnarvon, pinpointed the tension between stewardship and exploitation of nature during debate on the second Queensland Fisheries Bill, in September, 1887.[46] Foxton endorsed the legislation, which the Premier Samuel Griffith said was intended to prevent the destruction of

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[42] *N.Q. Register,* 22 February, 1936, Ingham News
[43] *T.D. Bulletin,* 23 May, 1936.
[44] *QPD*, 1952, vol. 203, 14 March, pp.1757-1758. Members complained that the 1937 Act had been ineffective because of too few inspectors and honorary protectors.
[45] *Ibid.,* Committee, 25 March, p.1933.
[46] Justin Fox Greenlaw Foxton (1849-1916) served in the Queensland Parliament from 1883 to 1904, and as Member for Brisbane in the Federal Parliament, from 1906 to 1910, representing the anti-socialist faction. He succeeded John de Poix Tyrel as Member for Carnarvon (D.B. Waterson, "Foxton, Justin Fox Greenlaw", *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* vol.8: 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1981, pp.569-570.)

valuable fish. However, he questioned the objectivity of Moreton Bay fishermen whom the government had consulted on proposed changes to the existing Act, in force since 1877. If a fisherman was a patriot he might accept controls, out of concern for the ultimate condition of the fishing trade ten years' hence, "when he might possibly be dead and buried". On the other hand it would be hard for a fisherman motivated by "what he could make out of his calling at the present time", to welcome the proposed restrictions on commercial netting.[47]

The language used by supporters of both the 1877 and 1888 Acts suggests moral censure of destructive and wasteful practices. Introducing the 1877 Bill, the Treasurer, James Robert Dickson, said the legislation aimed at controling "ruthless" fishing in various rivers, through limiting the use of fine-mesh nets, banning nets being drawn above high water mark and banning use of explosives to stun fish, among other measures. The Bill was needed to protect fish from the "ravages" of fishermen, particularly Chinese ones, in northern waters. "Ruthless", in 19th century usage, meant cruel, pitiless behaviour and "ravages" were understood as plunderings and pillages. Dickson claimed that there had been a great waste of fish in different parts of the colony through the actions of both Chinese and European fishermen. He appears to have sought ideas from fishing communities and port authorities on means of preserving young fish. Reflecting on the Act ten years later, he said he had intended to restrict commercial fishing, not harmless recreational fishing, to "prevent the wholesale destruction of fish by people engaged in the industry".[48]

Introducing the 1887 Bill, the Premier Samuel Griffith said he hoped the legislation would prevent the destruction of valuable fish that might otherwise spawn

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[47] *QPD*, 1887, vol..LII, pp. 535-536, 13 September, Queensland Fisheries Bill second reading, p. 535; committee sitting, 21 September, 1887, p. 665.
[48] *QPD*, 1877, vol..XXIV, 4th sess, 7th Pmt, 30 October, 1877, p.1480, pp.1494-1496; *QPD*, 1887, vol..LII, 5th sess, 9th Pmt, 21 September, 1887, p.670.

a profitable industry.[49] Ernest James Stevens, MLA for Logan, said commercial fishermen supported tougher legislation because of the "great destruction" of fish in Moreton Bay, which had led to the disappearance of some species. The Bill reaffirmed licensing of commercial fishermen, varied net mesh sizes to protect immature fish, varied some weight limits and tightened regulations banning the use of explosives and poison. Stevens observed that the existing Act had looked stringent, but had proved hard to police. Many fish were being destroyed illegally, because the fisheries inspector was powerless to bring unscrupulous fishermen to book.[50]

Dr William Saville-Kent, Queensland's first Commissioner of Fisheries, had identified areas for "profitable working" of beche-de-mer and pearl shell harvesting from Brisbane to Thursday Island in 1890. He recommended a minimum size for pearl shells and tighter controls on pearl shell and beche-de-mer industries, suggesting partitioning of the reef into segments to be leased to operators:

> Unless some such systematic course of procedure is adopted, the pearl shell fisheries, particularly, will in the near future incur the risk of depletion beyond limits of profitable working, as has happened in the case of ordinary oyster fisheries in many countries.[51]

Walter Henry Barnes, Treasurer in 1914, used rhetoric similar to his predecessors' when introducing the Fish and Oyster Bill, which merged the existing Queensland Fisheries Act, of 1887 and Oyster Act of 1885. He foreshadowed new powers for inspectors to curb destruction of fish by explosives, and the extension of licensing laws to all people using nets, to prevent the "ruthless destruction" of freshwater fish. The Attorney-General, Thomas O'Sullivan, told the Legislative

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[49] *QPD*, 1887, p.535.
[50] *Ibid.,* pp.535-536.
[51] *Ibid.*, p.321

Council the legislation was based on an inquiry in 1913 that found that freshwater fish were being "exterminated" by the use of traps.[52]

Scientists from The Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland, founded the Great Barrier Reef Committee in 1922, with members from Australian and New Zealand universities, learned societies and government departments. The committee, initially funded by the State government, pledged to "promote and conduct scientific enquiry into the fauna, flora and genesis of the Great Barrier Reef; and to protect and conserve the Reef, and to determine, report on and advise of its proper utilisation".[53] It contributed 1000 pounds towards the first major reef study, the Low Isles Expedition, carried out by Dr Maurice Yonge of Plymouth Marine Biological Laboratory and a team of British and Australian scientists in 1928-1929. Yonge, a specialist in marine invertebrates, investigated associations of plants and animals, the physiology of growth and reproduction of corals and the relative importance of plankton and algae,[54] but was guarded about the nature of the reef's "proper utilisation". He had a brief from the Queensland Government to investigate potential resources of the Reef, "with a view to discovering how they best can be developed".[55] His subsequent *Economic Report* recommend further work on trochus breeding, on discovering the life history of the gold lip pearl oyster, and recommended exploitation of dugongs, green turtles and hawksbill turtles. But he also warned in a report to the Great Barrier Reef Committee that green turtles faced serious depletion with indiscriminate fishing and that dugongs could be

[52] *QPD*, 1914, vol..CXVII, 3rd sess, 19th Pmt, Legislative Assembly, 18 August, 1914, p.604; Legislative Council, 29 September, 1914, p.1061.
[53] Bell, Peter and Veron, Charlie, *AIMS: The First Twenty-Five Years*, Townsville, AIMS, 1998, p11.
[54] Bowen, Great Barrier Reef, p.281.
[55] *Ibid.,* p.262.

exterminated.[56] The committee lobbied government authorities to protect the reef, in the absence of specific conservation laws, between 1930 and the 1960s. The State Secretary for Lands, Percy Pease, whose electorate, Herbert, covered the coast from Innisfail to Macknade, praised the committee in 1939 for defending the reef and its islands for "the people". Pease saw the Reef mainly as a potential tourist attraction:

> We all recognise that the Barrier Reef is one of the world's wonders. I may not, but perhaps my children's children will, see the time when the Barrier Reef will be as much visited by overseas people as the canyons in America.[57]

Post-World War II legislators saw fisheries management more as an ecological and economic necessity than a moral duty. In 1945, Eric Paul Decker, MLA for Sandgate, a Queensland People's Party Member and amateur fisherman, expressed alarm at widespread ignorance of how to maintain the balance of nature in the seas, even among master fishermen. Speaking during debate on the Hanlon government's Fish and Oyster Acts Amendments Bill, he said:

> We must deal with our fishing industry scientifically. Our fish must be protected. In my opinion it is that lack of protection which has brought our fishing industry to the position it is in today. The greatest menace to the industry, in my opinion, is the master fisherman.

Master fishermen were doing "irreparable damage" by taking fish from ocean beaches before they reached river estuaries for breeding. This was why the state's mullet supply was in decline.[58] Protection should be extended to birds such as the common shag, which helped preserve the balance of nature in the seas. But Harry Walker, the veteran MLA for Cooroora, took a different view. He considered the shag to be an enemy of fish life

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[56] *Ibid.,* pp.278-279, quoting from Charles Maurice Yonge. Low Islands Expedition reports to the GBRC.
[57] *QPD*, vol..clxx, 1939, 19 October, Supply debate, p.1068.
[58] *QPD*, 1945-46, vol..CLXXXV, 2nd sess, 30th Pmt, 13 September, 1945, pp.326-327.

which should be eradicated.[59] The Bill increased penalties for use of explosives, fishing with fixed nets and authorised fishery inspectors to patrol in unmarked boats.[60] Keith Bryson, secretary of the Townsville branch of the Queensland Commercial Fishermen's Association, campaigned in the 1950s for establishment of a marine science school to test the impact of farm run-off and tin mining tailings on fish numbers.[61]

By the early 1960s, fishing was reported to be in decline from Cairns south.[62] Fishermen could not afford to exercise the ideal of patriotic stewardship recommended by Justin Fox 70 years earlier. Queensland's marine riches had proved more modest than predicted by William Saville-Kent, in 1893, and zoologist J. Douglas Ogilby in 1916. Saville-Kent had seen "unlimited possibilities" for development of the finned fishery,[63] and Ogilby imagined the fishery as self-renewing, an asset which "with bounteous hand is ever engaged in filling up the gaps made in its ranks by the pitiless ravages of man, and which is wholly unaffected by flood or drought, by internal or external convulsion."[64] When introducing the Fisheries Act Amendment Bill in 1960, Treasurer Thomas Hiley conceded that Queensland was "far from rich in fish" in world terms. He understood the tension between husbanding and exploiting the state's fishery. "The fishing industry in Queensland will never be very large, and unless we take very great care in the

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[59] *Ibid.,* p.328; Second reading, 16 November, 1945, pp.1653-1654.
[60] *Ibid.,* pp.319-320.
[61] Keith Bryson, of White Lady Bay, Magnetic Island, interview with Ian Frazer, 10 November, 2002; Keith Bryson, telephone conversation with Ian Frazer, 18 July, 2003; Bowen, The Great Barrier Reef p. 335.
[62] *QPD*, 1959-60, vol.. 225, 3rd sess, 35th Pmt, p.1755, fish production in Australia was reported to have declined about 30 per cent between 1929 and 1957; pp.1757-1758, the Member for Cairns, George Walter Gordon Wallace asserted that fishing was deteriorating "from the North to the South", and blamed use of dynamite and stake-nets; pp.1747-1749, Hiley conceded that the existing laws were ineffective, that penalties were "a joke",and that the majority of licenses to use nets were held by amateurs who indulged in indiscriminate practices which had damaged fishing grounds and affected conservation of fish.
[63] W Saville-Kent, *The Great Barrier Reef of Australia*, London, 1893, p.313.
[64] J. Douglas Ogilby, *The Commercial Fish and Fisheries of Queensland*, Brisbane, 1954 (first ed. 1916) p.1, fn p. 89.

conservation of fish life we will have none at all," he warned.[65] The industry had an "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" attitude and was consequently rushing to destruction.[66] His Fisheries Act Amendment Bill of 1962 introduced a new licensing system to control the use of nets by amateur fishermen, proposed closure of net fishing in all rivers and estuaries south of Baffle Creek, near Mackay, and authorised police to act as ex-officio fisheries inspectors. Hiley said the Queensland Professional Fishermen's League had asked for the controls because of fears for members' long-term livelihood. "We have a responsibility to see that proper conservation is practised," he told Parliament. He feared prawn stocks in the Gulf of Carpentaria, seen as a bright hope for Queensland could be depleted as quickly as those of the Gulf of Mexico, which had been "fished bare" in 1962. "I am more than ever convinced that conservation has to be actively practiced if we are to have a successful fishing industry in this State," he asserted.[67]

Protecting vegetation

A.H. Barlow, Secretary for Public Instruction in the Kidston Government, acknowledged the State's duty to save "a small bit of nature" when he introduced the State Forests and National Parks Bill in 1906, after lobbying by the acclimatisation society. "It is very desirable that a small bit of nature should be reserved before it is all destroyed and cultivated and broken up," he said. The Bill aimed to reserve "some natural features of our country … as a place of amusement and recreation". The legislation had been inspired by national parks and state forests in southern States and

[65] *QPD*., vol. 225, 3rd session, 35th Parliament, 1960, 1 December, p.1752.
[66] *QPD*, 1962, vol. 233, 3rd sess, 36th Pmt, 30 October, p.1150.
[67] *QPD*, vol. 233, 3rd session 36th Parliament, 1962, first reading of Fisheries Act Amendment Bill, 25 September p.554; second reading, 30 October, pp.1151-1153

the United States. He considered it "not much of a Bill", but saw it as probably a good beginning.[68]

Supporters of the Native Plants Protection Act of 1930 were more forthright, arguing that the uplifting value of scenic areas and native flora must be protected and shared with future generations. Townsville businessman and later president of the Townsville District Development Association, R.E.A. McKimmin, had argued in 1930 for strict protection of bird life, ferns and orchids at Mount Spec.[69]

Introducing the legislation, the Secretary for Agriculture, Henry Walker, condemned despoliation of the state's beautiful flora from Brisbane to Cairns, [70] and said the government had a duty to preserve the beautiful flora in which the country was so rich.[71] Nature lovers had complained that Japanese and other traders were stripping orchids from the islands and that motorists were stealing native flowers, tree ferns and orchids from public reserves such as Mount Tambourine in southern Queensland.[72] The Act supplemented existing flora protection under the Local Authorities Act and was to be policed by honorary rangers as well as government officials. It applied only to removal of specified native plants from Crown Land, State forests, National Parks and public parks.

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[68] *QPD*, Legislative Assembly, 1906, vol. XCVIII, 29 November, p.1930. The government proclaimed Queensland's first National Park in 1908 at the Bunya Mountains, followed by Lamington National Park in 1915 and Mount Bellenden Ker in 1921. (*The National Parks of Queensland,* Queensland Department of Local Government and Conservation, 1964, p.25).
[69] Linda Venn, *Paluma The First Eighty Years 1870s-1950s*, Thuringowa City Council, 2002, pp.47-48.
[70] *QPD*, 1930, vol. 156, October 28, p.1888.
[71] *Ibid,* November 25, p.2551.
[72] *Ibid*, pp.2551-2552; *N.Q. Register*, 10 September, 1932, p.63. Walker quoted from a letter from the government medical officer on Thursday Island, Dr G.H. Vernon, alleging the export of "enormous amounts" of orchids to China from Torres Strait and the Great Barrier Reef islands. Vernon also emphasised the need to save the orchids for posterity: "The extreme beauty of these plants demands that they be preserved for future generations … their national importance as Queensland's most striking flower, though little known, cannot be overstated." Vernon, who was secretary of the Thursday Island branch of the Royal Geographical Society, argued that fear of legal proceedings would curb the trade.

Opposition Leader William Forgan Smith endorsed the law as a form of stewardship and a means of preserving a fragment of what the country was like before white settlement. “It is not pleasant to contemplate that future generations of Queenslanders may grow up in ignorance of the virgin state of the country,” he said.[73] Iris Longman, the Progressive Country National Party MLA for Bulimba, saw the Bill as confirmation of growing public appreciation of “the flowers of our bush”. She was glad the law would not ban the picking of native flowers the field naturalists’ annual wildflower show helped to educate children and adults.[74]

Randolph Bedford, novelist and Labor Member for Warrego, supported the Bill for aesthetic, economic and nationalistic reasons and, like Walker and Forgan Smith, argued that his grandchildren must have the chance to see Australia “as it was and still is”.[75] His case assumed the moral superiority of the minority who had a “proper sense of beauty”, free from the compulsion to destroy the country’s “beauty resources” for passing gratification.[76] Australians, in fact, seemed to be slowly learning to see beauty in countryside their ancestors thought ugly, after killing the kangaroo, emu and lyre bird, introducing rabbits, foxes and prickly pear and destroying the flora of the oldest country in the world. Sturt’s desert pea, with its “black and red Mephistophelian beauty” deserved to be treated with reverence.[77] The laws invested chosen tracts of land and floral emblems with a status to be upheld out of national pride and love of beauty, not out of fear of penalties for breaches.

George Groom, managing director of *The Johnstone River Advocate,* lobbied in 1936 and 1937 to preserve a 20 chain-wide strip of jungle either side of a section of

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[73] *QPD*, 1930, 28 October, p.1889.
[74] *Ibid.,* 25 November, p.2555.
[75] *Ibid.,* 1930, 25 November., p.2554.
[76] *Ibid.,* 1930, 28 October, p.1889.
[77] *Ibid.,* 1930, 25 November, p.2553. Randolph Bedford, novelist and Labor MLA for Warrego, described the desert pea thus and argued for protection of its “distinctive beauty”.

the Palmerston Highway between Innisfail to Millaa Millaa. Groom, whose newspaper advocated rapid development of the North, to make Australia safe for Australians, argued for this limited preservation of tropical scenery for the benefit of tourists. [78] He also promoted what his paper described as the district's "assets of great scenic grandeur", in his capacity as president of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Far Northern Queensland.[79] The federation adopted a resolution from Millaa Millaa Chamber of Commerce in May 1936, asking the Minister for Lands and local MP, Percy Pease, to provide in the design of blocks in the Palmerston area, between Henrietta Creek and McHugh Bridge, retention of existing flora.[80] The case for saving the "beautiful scrub" was also taken up by the President of the Australian Provincial Press Association, Mr J.H. Manning, after a visit to Innisfail,[81] the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Queensland,[82] and *The Courier-Mail*, which praised the "unsuspected prodigality of nature" in the Innisfail district.[83] The Commissioner for Main Roads, Mr J. R. Kemp, announced in November 1937 that the "beautiful tropical jungle" flanking the highway would be saved for posterity.[84] These roadsides won National Park status in 1941.[85]

Meanwhile, plant collectors flaunted the moral sanction implicit in the State's flora protection laws. In 1939, the Forgan Smith Government proclaimed 18 extra sanctuaries and recruited 166 honorary protectors under amendments to the Native Plants Protection Act.[86] The Hanlon government declared all of Queensland's islands fauna sanctuaries in 1952 and the Nicklin government protected living coral on the

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[78] *The Johnstone River Advocate*, leading article, "The Never Never Road', 21 January, 1930
[79] *Ibid.,* 15 November, 1937.
[80] The Johnstone River Advocate, 26 May, 1936.
[81] *Ibid.,* 24 July 1936.
[82] *Ibid.,* 31 July 1936.
[83] *Ibid.,* 1 September 1935, quoting undated issue of *The Courier-Mail*
[84] *Ibid.,* 16 November 1937.
[85] Department of Local Government and Conservation, *The National Parks of Queensland*, Brisbane, 1964, p.19.
[86] QPP, 1940, Vol. I, Dept Agriculture and Stock annual report, 1939-40, p.5 (p.919).

reef with the State Fisheries Act 1957-62.[87] In 1959, the Member for Cook, Herbert Adair told Parliament that specimens of Cooktown Orchid (*Dendrobium Phalaenopsis*) were being "wiped out altogether" from around Cooktown and the Cape. "Most of the area round Cooktown and the Cape York Peninsula is Crown land but people take away these orchids by the thousands," he said during debate on recognition of the orchid as Queensland's official floral emblem.[88]

The practice of clearing trees by ringbarking seems to have gradually lost favour between 1900 and 1970.[89] Dorothea Mackellar described the forlornness of "stark white ringbarked forests/ All tragic to the moon", in *My Country,* in 1911 and legislators later criticised ringbarking for both aesthetic and environmental reasons.[90] Farmers and graziers from Gumlu, south of Home Hill, argued with a shire council official in 1947 over his warning that the practice could cause flooding and erosion round Molongle Creek. The farmers believed killing trees would free up water from springs during drought. The debate continued in 1960, when a correspondent to *The Home Hill Observer* condemned the MLA for Bowen, Dr Peter Delamothe, for supporting ringbarking in the upper reaches of Molongle Creek, where there had been flash flooding, saltation and erosion:

> Clear the country of its timber, burn what dry grass and herbage is left at the end of each winter and within a century the fertility of our lands will be eroded out to sea.[91]

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[87] Judith Wright, *The Coral Battleground,* Melbourne, 1977, p.16
[88] *QPD*, vol. 224, 1959, 23 September, pp.429-430.
[89] Lines, Great South Land, p.133 notes that William Woolls, a member of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, argued in *The Victorian Naturalist,* in 1891, against ringbarking, as a ruinous waste of commercial serviceable timber.
[90] *QPD*, vol. 157, 1930, p.2552, 25 November. Secretary for Agriculture Harry Walker criticised destruction of trees along the railway from Brisbane to Gympie "for a paltry sheet of bark"; *QPD*, vol. 165, 1939, 19 October, p.1002, MLA from Murrumba Frank Nicklin (Country Party) condemned "indiscriminate ringbarking" as a cause of erosion and siltation.
[91] *T.D. Bulletin*, 18 January, 1947;*TheHome Hill Observer,* 9 September, 1960, letter from W.Greet.

However, ringbarking, with its disturbing legacy of stark, dead trees, still appears to have been a widely practised form of clearing around Australia into the late 1960s.[92]

The Nicklin Government's Minister for Public Lands and Irrigation, Adolf Muller, introduced the title "Scenic Areas" for National Parks of less than 1000ac (400ha) in his Forestry Bill of 1960. The name made no difference to the status or management of the reserved land, but was "considered more appropriate", Muller told Parliament.[93] The Bill confirmed Parliament's sole right to declare National Parks, defined as reserves of more than 1000ac considered to be of scenic, scientific or historic interest. The Conservator of Forests was to be responsible for preserving parks in natural conditions. He paid tribute to members of the National Parks Association for their voluntary help and foreshadowed greater recruitment of honorary rangers. "We are anxious to protect national parks and to that end we are endeavouring to create a public spirit of assistance," he said.[94] Queensland boasted about 1 million acres of national parks in 1964[95] and 2.3 million acres by 1968, when a new classification system allowed for core "primitive areas" within parks, intended to be free of all development.

Conserving soil, water and cultural heritage

In 1963, the government provided legislative support for the National Trust of Queensland, whose charter was to preserve and maintain "chattels, lands and

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[92] Len Webb, "The Rape of the Forests", in A.J. Marshall (ed) *The Great Extermination,* Adelaide, 1966, p.161.
[93] *QPD*, vol. 225, 1960, second reading of Forestry Bill, 5 November, p1146.
[94] *Ibid.,* p.1145.
[95] QPP, 1964-65, 2nd session, 37th Parliament, Report of the Conservator of Forests 1964, p.1099.

buildings" of national, historic, artistic, architectural or scientific interest.[96] A sponsor of the National Trust Association, the Member for Sherwood, John Herbert, said he saw the function of the trust as the preservation of the best examples of the state's pioneering past. The trust regarded itself as independent of government, reliant on funding from membership fees, following the British model. "If the Trust is completely independent financially of the Government, it is in a position, if such an occasion should arise, to comment on Government treatment of historic buildings," he said.[97] The Labor Opposition saw the absence of government funding as limiting the Trust's ability to acquire, repair and maintain historic buildings, and the timing of the Bill as ironic, since it came immediately after demolition of the vestry of the first Anglican Cathedral in Queen's Park.[98]

The Coalition government established a conservation portfolio off-handedly in 1963, when Country Party stalwart Harold Richter had "conservation" tacked on to his previous Lands portfolio. Neither he nor Premier Frank Nicklin spelt out his new role as Minister for Lands and Conservation after the Coalition government was re-elected in September 1963. The *Townsville Daily Bulletin* explained that the government had created a "Department of Conservation to cover irrigation and forestry",[99] but in fact Richter's portfolio also included local government. He saw his role as protecting and developing the state's forestry reserves and supervising an

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[96] Hutton and Connors, Environment Movement, p.96
[97] *QPD*, vol. 236, 1963-64, 1st session 37th Parliament, 8 November, 1963, p.1353
[98] Professor Colin Roderick, of the University College of Townsville, began campaigning to establish a North Queensland branch of the Trust in 1967, arguing that it could help preserve the North's pre-history, Aboriginal relics, beaches, Great Barrier Reef, forests and wildlife. The *T. D. Bulletin* reported that Professor Roderick told Innisfail High School students that the proposed branch would help restore the balance between man and wildlife in the North. "I have no doubt that from among the younger generation of the University College of Townsville will come leaders who will see that man and wildlife in this part of the world will live in balance," he said. [*T. D. Bulletin*, 14 October 1967]
[99] *T.D. Bulletin*, 29 September, 1963.

"efficient and balanced investment in water conservation".[100] Deputy Leader of the Labor Opposition, Eric Lloyd, criticised what he described as Richter's "very limited" powers as Minister for Conservation. "It must be realised that whilst there is a Ministry of Conservation, the Minister must be given additional power to override the granting of huge tracts of land to capital interests to make profits from and destroy completely, regardless of whether there is a recurring dividend coming from the soil." he said.[101] The Labor Member for Tablelands, Edwin Wallis-Smith suggested that Richter should also take charge of soil conservation, since action was needed to stop soil being washed away on the Atherton Tableland.[102]

The State government had taken a role in proscribing harmful farming practices after flooding in the Burdekin Delta in 1940 scoured large sections of two riverbank farms and dumped large quantities of sand on downstream properties, causing "hundreds of thousands of pounds" damage.[103] The then Agriculture Minister, Frank Bulcock, established the Burdekin River Trust in February, 1941, with power to levy landholders to carry out work to prevent and repair damage to river banks caused by floods and cyclones. The trust began restoration work with a 20,000 pounds government grant.

Landholders with riverfront properties on the Burdekin Delta faced loss of soil through water erosion during floods between 1930 and 1970. The Home Hill Chamber of Commerce warned the State Irrigation and Water Supply Department in 1931 that erosion was a "potential source of danger'' to many farms and the township itself. The chamber sought remedial work, including planting of bamboo and tough grasses on

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[100] *QPD*, vol. 236, 1st session, 37th Parliament, 1963, 12 November, pp.1383-1387.
[101] *Ibid.,* p1388.
[102] *Ibid.,* p1396.
[103] Kerr, Black Snow, p.210; *QPD*, vol. 241, 1965, 3rd session of 37th Parliament, 21 September, debate on River Improvement Trust Acts Amendment Bill, p.562. Ayr Shire Council and the Burdekin Cane Growers executive requested the State Government investigation which led to establishment of the river trust.

the riverbank, to be carried out as an unemployment relief scheme.[104] The Department of Labour and Industry approved the scheme, which foundered on a conflict between Ayr Shire Council and the Pioneer Mill Suppliers' committee over whether trees should be cleared from the river bed.[105] The Burdekin Cane Growers executive sought government action in 1940 after floodwaters washed away parts of two farms. This led to the establishment of a new local authority, the Burdekin River Trust, in 1941, which was given power to levy rates to pay for preventative work such as planting the riverbanks with shrubs in 1942, to rebuild rock and timber bulkheads, in 1947.

A report by the state government's Bureau of Investigation in 1947 recommended reallocations of cane assignments to protect erosion-prone land. The report by land management investigator Frank Skinner revealed extensive soil erosion, river siltation, river bank erosion and scouring on the Atherton Tableland and coastal strip from Cairns to Bundaberg. This included gullies up to 15 feet (4m) deep in the banks of the Burdekin, where he found layers of river sand washed on top of crop land. Skinner attributed these problems to poor farming practices. He recommended establishment of national parks and state forests in high-rainfall catchment areas and measures to conserve natural vegetation on water courses. The State Coordinator-General of Public Works, John Kemp, ordered the survey before his appointment in 1949 as chairman of the Burdekin River Authority. However, he used few of Skinner's findings in the authority's report on the "Burdekin River Irrigation, Hydro-Electric and Flood Mitigation project,'' issued in 1951. J.M.Powell regards Kemp's neglect of environmental risks as typical of the attitude of architects of large-scale development proposals of the 1950s and 60s.[106] The Hanlon government set up

[104] *The Home Hill Observer,* 11 June, 1931
[105] Kerr, p.210, citing Ayr Shire Council minutes, 11 November, 1932, 8 November, 1935
[106] Powell, Plains of Promise, pp.248-249, quoting from Annual Report of the Commissioner of Irrigation and Water Supply, 1947-48. Skinner's report is dated 27 August, 1947.

the authority in 1949 to co-ordinate plans for a Burdekin River dam and vast new irrigation area, a scheme that had been first floated in 1889.[107]

Home Hill farmers formed a Soil Conservation Auxiliary Committee in 1946 to deal with "many important points on soil conservation.''[108] The state government established an advisory and co-ordinating committee on soil conservation within the Department of Agriculture in 1947 and formalised its work with the Soil Conservation Act of 1951, which aimed among other things to streamline co-operation between landholders and state and local authorities in flood mitigation projects.[109] The branch became the Soil Conservation Authority in 1965, through a new Act which provided a framework for landholders to carry out work jointly, either with government help or local sponsorship.[110]

A soil conservation discourse can be found in the North from the 1930s, involving farmers, scientists, politicians and the Press. *The Townsville Bulletin* reported the loss of topsoil to wind erosion in New South Wales and Victoria in 1936, caused by drought, overstocking, rabbits and indiscriminate removal of scrub. Fearing that significant loss was occurring in the North, the newspaper condemned the clearing of grass, shrubs and timber from riverbanks and advocated reservation of a chain strip of original growth as a protection against water erosion.[111] Professor Ernest Goddard, the Department of Agriculture's Science Co-ordinating Officer reported in 1936 that water erosion was washing away hillsides in steeply sloping banana country, and causing the loss of rich topsoil.[112] The Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Far North Queensland adopted a resolution from its Innisfail branch

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[107] Kerr, pp.230-231.
[108] *T. D. Bulletin,* 29 November, 1946.
[109] Skerman, Guiding Agriculture, p.209; *QPD* 1951, p.239, Soil Conservation Bill
[110] *Ibid.,* pp.359-360.
[111] *T.D. Bulletin*, 23 May, 1936.
[112] QPP, 1936, vol. 2 of 2, Report of department of Agriculture and Stock, 1935-36, p.18 (p.494), Report of the Science Co-ordinating Officer.

in the same year, seeking an "extensive scheme for the prevention of soil erosion in North Queensland''. The Minister for Agriculture, Frank Bulcock, acknowledged a problem of "considerable magnitude'', which he said was under investigation by a special committee.[113]

Country Party MLA Frank Nicklin, had warned in 1939 against indiscriminate ringbarking along watercourses and creeks as a source of erosion and siltation.[114] *The North Queensland Register* reported concerns about soil erosion raised during the biennial conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in Canberra in 1939. Russell Grimwade, a Melbourne industrialist and member of the Victorian Forest League, told the conference that deforestation, soil erosion and diminution of "green leaf surface'' were threats to the balance of animal and plant life around the world.[115] The federal Labor Government's Minister for Information, Arthur Caldwell, wrote in 1945 of a trip around Australia in which he saw "sand drifts banking over the fences of dead farms'' and "great water-torn scars in hillsides where the settlers' and timber-getters' axes have fallen too heavy.'' It was time for Australians to throw away their rose-coloured spectacles and admit that their land was not rich, but comparatively poor, being dry and lacking great rivers. Defeating soil erosion would cost money and manpower, he warned.[116] Tractor-maker Waugh and Josephsen advertised their Caterpillar tractor in *The Herbert River Express* in 1950 as a machine to beat soil erosion, asserting that "today soil erosion is the Australian farmer's greatest enemy. To fight it he must literally "move the earth'."[117]

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[113] *The Johnstone River Advocate,* 26 May, 1936; 6 April, 1937.
[114] *QPD*, vol. CLXV, 1939, p.1002, supply debate, 19 October
[115] *N.Q Register,* 14 January, 1939; Martin Mulligan and Stuart Hill, *Ecological Pioneers,* Melbourne, 2001, pp.118-119.
[116] *The Home Hill Observer,* 23 March, 1945.
[117] *The Herbert River Express,* 21 March, 1950.

John Bradsen, a law lecturer and specialist in soil conservation and land management policy, has argued that landholders up to the mid-twentieth century acquired a sense of obligation for land management, under Australia's leasehold tenure system. "Individuals were under an obligation to comply, in the wider community interest of maintaining productivity of the landscape,'' he asserted. Landholders, under laws such as South Australia's Sand Drift Act of 1923 "were not free to chose whether to comply.'' However, laws introduced from the 1950s onwards had promoted an "optional'' form of stewardship, which removed the need to adhere to a group obligation. Australian legislators had moved towards a United States model promoting individual "stewardship'' of the land, through technical advice.[118] While Bradsen gives few examples of obligation-driven co-operation, I have found evidence of a communal approach to land management issues in the relatively regimented canegrowing areas of North Queensland, which continued beyond the 1950s.

Harold Collins, Secretary for Agriculture and Stock from 1946 to 1957, established a Soil Conservation Service in 1951, extending work on soil erosion previously carried out within his department. He told Parliament erosion was often caused by "unwise" use of the land, especially on the Atherton Tableland and some sugar-growing districts, and warned that the State's agricultural potential could be squandered in 50 or 100 years without "some protective work".[119]

In 1965, Harold Richter gave river trusts greater powers over potentially harmful farming practices. The River Improvement Trust Acts Amendment Bill empowered trusts to prohibit owners from cutting down trees and ploughing river banks in sensitive locations. The MLA for Burdekin, Arthur Coburn (Independent), welcomed the amendment as protection from the foolish people who disturbed soil

[118] John Bradsen, "Soil Conservation: History, Law and Learning", in, Stephen Dovers (ed) *Environmental History and Policy, Still Settling Australia,* Melbourne, 2000, pp.273-280.
[119] *QPD*, 1951, 5 September, Soil Conservation Bill, initiation in committee, pp.239-240.

too close to river banks.[120] But the Opposition Leader, John Duggan, of Toowoomba, predicted friction between experts and farmers sceptical of the infallibility of science. He argued for a final right of appeal to the Minister over contentious directives.[121] State intervention in environmental management extended to beach protection in 1968 after cyclonic weather eroded the Gold Coast coastline, exposing valuable properties to the storm surge, and tourism dropped by 30 per cent in the next 12 months.[122] A Beach Protection Authority was empowered to declare beach erosion control districts along the coast and to ban building on sea-front sand dunes.[123] Richter resigned because of ill-health in 1969, and the conservation portfolio was incorporated with marine and Aboriginal affairs, then dropped altogether in 1974.[124]

Saving water

Samuel Griffith described water conservation, in 1886, as the most important subject facing his government, with bearing on the future history of the colony.[125] The Irrigation Act of 1891, a jumble according to J.M. Powell,[126] provided for establishment of irrigation areas and boards, and ultimately the controversial Inkerman irrigation scheme, on the south-eastern bank of the Burdekin River.[127] The Water Authorities Act of 1891 gave a framework for management of town water supplies. Farmers and townspeople in the North, even those with usually abundant rainfall and seemingly inexhaustible aquifers, were forced to take care of water. Not

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[120] *QPD*, vol. 241, 1965, 3rd session of 37th Parliament, 1965, 21 September, p.564.
[121] *Ibid.,* Second reading of River Improvement Trust Acts Amendment Bill, 13 October, p.829
[122] Fitzgerald, From 1915, p.463.
[123] *QPD*, vol. 248, 1967-68, 2nd session, 28th Parliament, 1968, pp.2515-2516.
[124] Fitzgerald, From 1915, pp.393-394. The State's first Minister for Environment was appointed in 1981.
[125] *QPD*, L.A., 4th session, 9th Parliament, vol. 69, 1886, p.818, debate on motion by Francis Kates, Member for Darling Downs, for Royal Commission on Irrigation and Water Supply
[126] Powell, Plains of Promise, p.63
[127] Kerr, Black Snow, pp.154-159, describes the closer-settlement scheme as a financially disastrous state enterprise.

even the Johnstone River district with its average rainfall of 40 points (10mm) daily was immune from drought. Innisfail's annual rainfall fluctuated from highs of 193 inches in 1891, 211 inches in 1894 and 192 inches in 1921 to lows of 69 inches in 1902 and 75 inches in 1916 and 76 inches in 1966.[128] Townsville's varied from highs of 97 inches in 1894 and 83 inches in 1917, to lows of 10 inches in 1923 and 11 inches in 1935.[129]

Townsville depended on limited underground water for its first sixty or so years. In 1885, the government hydraulic engineer, John Baillie Henderson, described the water supply from a well two miles from town as "abundant'', but had great doubts about its purity.[130] The Water Supply Department had investigated pumping fresh water 17miles (27km) from Alligator Creek in 1878. Residents supplemented the town supply with rain water tanks and by sinking their own wells.[131] The city council built the first weir on the Ross River in 1908, and a second a few years later but procrastinated over Alligator Creek and alternatives such as Crystal Creek and Black River. It introduced tough restrictions in 1923, one of Townsville's driest years, with 10 inches 56 points of rain (267mm). The restrictions continued as the city's population grew from 21,348 in 1920 to 31,800 in 1930.[132] Residents were allowed 55 gallons (250l) a day in dry seasons. They learnt to use water sparingly, perhaps helped by its quality which J.M. Powell says was a byword for "poor''. Average per capita daily consumption in Townsville in 1934 was 58 gallons (264l), compared with

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[128] *The Johnstone River Advocate,* 28 January, 1930, gives monthly rainfall figures from 1886 to 1929, based on statistics from the Commonwealth Meteorologist.
[129] *T.D. Bulletin,* 8 January, 1964, p.7, "Wet and Dry Years".
[130] Powell, *Plains of Promise,* pp.47-48, quoting from *V&P*, vol. 3, 1885, Memorandum to the Colonial Treasurer on Water Supply by John Baillie Henderson, Government Hydraulic Engineer.
[131] Gibson-Wilde, Gateway, p.141; *T.D. Bulletin,* 9 December, 1930, letter from "Queensland Boy''.
[132] Powell, Plains of Promise, pp.102-103; *T.D. Bulletin,* 6 June, 1923, 8 January, 1964; Census 4 April, 1921, and *Statistics of the State of Queensland*.

80 gallons (363l) in Cairns.[133]

The arrival of Australian and US troops in 1942 swelled the city's population from 30,000 to 100,000.[134] The city responded by building another weir in 1943 and railing in water pumped from Rollingstone Creek, 33 miles (53km) north. Water from Rollingstone was still being carried daily by rail in 1946, a dry year.[135] In 1947 Townsville City Council approved a one million pound scheme to pump 1.5 million gallons (6.7 million litres) a day from Crystal Creek, about 40 miles (64km) north-west of the city. Annual water consumption reached 1,183 million gallons (5.323 million litres) in 1946,[136] and outstripped predictions in the 1950s and 60s.[137] By 1963, consumption had increased to 9 million gallons (40 million litres a day), or 170 gallons (765l) per head. Restrictions continued in dry seasons such as 1961 to 1967, all but one year with below-average rainfall.[138] Townsville's population increased from 51,153 to 71,265 between 1960 and 1970, and the council decided on a new dam on the Ross River, at Five Head Creek, eventually opened in 1974.[139]

Residents used water frugally but seem to have struggled with voluntary limits. The editor of *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* endorsed the council's plea in October 1963 for reduced consumption to remove the need for restrictions, by cutting daily use from 170 gallons (765l) per capita, to 150 gallons (675l). This could be achieved by watering plants sparingly, the paper advised. The council would,

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[133] Powell, Plains of Promise, p.104; water supply schemes were opened in Innisfail in 1934, Ingham 1939 and Ayr in 1964 (*The Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News,* 14 March, 1939; Kerr, p.253)
[134] Darryl McIntyre, *Townsville at War, 1942,* Townsville, 1992, p.53.
[135] Powell, Plains of Promise, p.104, this was called Aplin's Weir; Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui, *Thirty-three Miles to Rollingstone,* Thuringowa, 2003, p.15, citing Jack O'Connor, *In The Bush at Rollingstone,* Rollingstone, 1984, p.40.
[136] *Townsville Daily Bulletin,* 21 February 1947, p.29, `Hermit Park A.L.P. rift on Mt. Spec'
[137] Powell, Plains of Promise, p.275, quoting I. Fairweather, `History of Townsville's Water Supply Augmentation' (duplicate typescript), City Council, Townsville, 28 April 1966, p.8. He says water consumption in 1960 was double that predicted in 1934.
[138] *Queensland Year Book, 1970*, p. 24, annual rainfall, 1960 to 1969.
[139] Powell, Plains of Promise, p.276.

otherwise, introduce restrictions until the rain arrived and November was not the most reliable month. Townspeople, like farmers, appear to have accepted the limits of the dry tropics' climate, hence Townsville's "brown'' image[140], and to have learnt to hang on for the inevitable rain.[141] Champions of Townsville and the North did not see scarcity of water as a severe limit to development.

In 1936, an editorial writer in *The North Queensland Register* tried to salvage some hope from what looked like 65 years of declining rainfall in the Townsville district. Average rainfall from 1870 to 1900 had been 51 inches (1295mm), 1900 to 1930 averaged 44 inches (1117mm) and from 1930 to 1936 averaged 36 inches (914mm). Graziers had experienced drought in seven of the previous 10 years, the Ross River had ceased flowing in 1934, and some commentators believed rainfall for the whole of Australia was in irreversible decline. The *Register*, however, took the view that weather patterns were thousands of years old and could not suddenly change. The paper suggested the "unfavourable cycle" could end any time and defended settlers against the charge of inadvertently changing the weather, in an argument that implied awareness of the fears expressed by George Perkins Marsh and Lewis Bernays. "Of one thing we may be sure and that is the hand of man had nothing to do with the scarcity of rain," the *Register* asserted. "The forests are scarcely untouched and further west the great treeless plains are in the most natural conditions that have obtained for centuries."[142]

If uncertain rainfall bred caution, tropical lows gave farmers and townspeople a strange sense of hope. Cyclones such as Sigma and Leonta which hit Townsville in 1896 and 1903 respectively, and the unnamed one which swamped the Johnston River – Tully district in 1918 caused destruction but also restoration. Edmund

[140] *T.D. Bulletin,* 10 October, 1950.
[141] *Ibid.,* 31 October, 1963.
[142] *N.Q. Register,* 4 January, 1936, p.6.

Banfield considered abandoning Dunk Island after a cyclone in 1918 left "not a tree or shrub or blade of grass that does not show signs of buffeting", acres of grassland covered in salt and "the bush impenetrable with fallen timber". However, he wrote to his friend George Barrymore a week later that he and his wife had recovered from their inconvenience and that he was ready to take his hat off to the next cyclone, "before it gets the chance of doing anything rude".[143]

Cyclone Sigma was a catalyst for reconstruction of the Port of Townsville and Leonta broke the long drought in western Queensland.[144] The regenerative power of the Wet generally and cyclones in particular have, perhaps, contributed to the ambivalence expressed by farmers towards calls for conservation based on arguments like those of George Perkins Marsh and William Lines that man is capable of irreparable damage to the balance of nature.

Conclusions

Interested and informed public opinion had to be ahead of governments to further conservation, Francis Ratcliffe, secretary of the Australian Conservation Foundation, told a "Caring for Queensland" symposium in 1967. The vastness of the Australian continent and the low density of rural populations meant many conservation problems developed insidiously and were hard to study.[145] In fact, most of the legislation discussed in this chapter reflected interested and informed public opinion, from naturalists such as Lewis Bernays and Alex Chisholm and from bushwalkers, farmers and farming organisations. Geoffrey Bolton has observed that

[143] E.J.Banfield to "Barry" [George Barrymore], 12 March, 1918 and 19 March, 1918. Mitchell Library MSS 472
[144] *T.D.Bulletin* 8 March 2003
[145] F.N.Ratcliffe, "The Foundation, Present and Future", from Papers presented at a symposium, "Caring for Queensland", Australian Conservation Foundation, University of Queensland, 14 to 15 October, 1967, pp.59-60.

from 1880 residents in suburbs were calling for conservation of distinctive features of the Australian environment which had vanished from their urban worlds.[146] Wilderness areas such as Mount Bellenden Ker, the McPherson Ranges and Hinchinbrook Island demanded respect, with or without National Park status. Many Queenslanders deplored the slaughter of koalas and possums and supported the Press campaign for their reprieve. The status of the Great Barrier Reef as a "natural wonder of the world" at risk of despoliation was recognised by *The Townsville Daily Bulletin,* a reasonable mirror of public opinion, years before it was officially protected.[147] The Queensland Government's native flora protection laws in 1930 coincided with increasing interest in Australian natives as garden specimens.[148] Newspapers such as *The North Queensland Register* and *The Johnstone River Advocate* supported the legislation by publishing lists of native plants covered by the Native Plants Protection Act, of 1930, and native creatures protected by the Queensland Animals and Birds Acts of the 1920s.[149] The Press reported prosecutions for breaches of fauna, fisheries and forestry laws, highlighting penalties for offences such as shooting pigeons, dynamiting fish, cutting timber on Crown land, and illegal net fishing.[150] Bowen journalist Alexander Vennard promoted kindness to animals and care for nature through his Children's Corner column published in *The North Queensland Register*

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[146] G.Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers, Australians Make Their Environment, 1788-1980,* Sydney, 1980, p.99.
[147] *T.D.Bulletin,* 10 August, 1967.
[148] Katie Holmes, "Gardens", in *Journal of Australian Studies,* No 61, 1999, p.161.
[149] *N.Q. Register*, 1 August, 1931, "Native Plants", p.63; *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 24 January, "Bird and Animal Life'
[150] For example, *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 21 January, 1930, p.1 "Foreigners dynamite fish", *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 17 January, 1939, Johnstone Shire Council, Summons Court report about land-owner charged with cutting timber on Crown land without a licence; *The Evening Advocate*, 22 October, 1964, "Breached Fauna Laws on Second day in Australia". *T. D. Bulletin*, 3 November, 1966, "Fight Followed The Confiscation Of Net', p.3.

and *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* from the 1920s until his death in 1947. Adults as well as children read the column, he noted in 1931.[151]

But public opinion made little difference to the Mount Garnet tin dredgers who polluted the Herbert River with clay sediment from 1942 to 1984. Residents of Hinchinbrook Shire appear to have held their first protest meeting in 1944, after a tailings dam burst in heavy rain.[152] Although Hinchinbrook Shire Council, Ingham Chamber of Commerce and the Member for Kennedy, George Jensen, achieved some concessions from the dredge companies under the Mining Act, the river water was reported to be still turbid for "five or six months a year" in the 1950s. Sludge fouled pumping spears, reduced fish life, forced crocodiles out of the river and polluted the beach at Dungeness. In 1973 the miners ignored the council's appeal to good stewardship in the form of arguments that the community was entitled to a river which was not polluted and that mining operators did not have the right to discharge waste materials into the Herbert. The miners were not swayed by being blamed for having spoilt a once crystal-clear steam.[153] Mining continued until 1984, as the companies argued that run-off from roadworks and sugar farms caused more turbidity than their operations, and that this pollution was not harmful to health. The Mines Minister Ivan Gibbs finally issued "show cause'' notices to miners believed to be causing pollution, threatening to revoke their leases unless they could prove their operations were not causing pollution.[154]

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[151] Vennard wrote two columns for the *N.Q. Register* and *T.D. Bulletin,* "On The Track' under the penname Bill Boyang and "Children's Corner' under the pseudonym Maurice Dean. "I often receive letters from parents or adult readers of the "Corner'," he wrote in the *Register* on 12 December, 1931. Author Glenville Pike was among the "many hundreds" of children who wrote to Maurice Dean to share views on wildlife conservation (Ethel M Barker, *The Story of Bill Boyang*, Bowen, 1978).
[152] Herbert River Express, 4 April, 1950.
[153] A submission by Hinchinbrook Shire Council to the Water Quality Council of Queensland, 12 December, 1973 (JCU, N.Q. Collection, NQE 363.73)
[154] *T.D. Bulletin,* 5 May, 1984.

Queensland legislators tried at first to reinforce moral sanctions on shameful and wasteful uses and abuses of nature. They lacked the resources to enforce laws protecting native birds, animals and fish, but hoped to encourage citizens to behave responsibly. Farmers perhaps resented the state's intrusion because they believed they were capable of practising a commonsense stewardship of natural resources. In fact, land-use in the cane industry during the period of my study was highly regulated by the cane-assignment system. Stricter controls on commercial and amateur fishermen in the 1960s acknowledged that many could not afford what Justin Foxton called the patriot's sense of duty to future generations. However, the state's attempts at proscriptive stewardship of the state's fisheries were still tentative, in the absence of the endorsement of public opinion, achieved by activist advocates for the Great Barrier Reef and North Queensland rainforests later in the 1960s.

Chapter 4

Attitudes to the land: pioneers and farmers

Farmers expressed values constantly when clearing, cultivating and cropping. Their endeavours did not amount simply to a transaction between insatiable capital and long-suffering nature. They made sense of what they were doing through constructions of pioneering, Australia, Nature and Providence. For example, some settlers of British ancestry appear to have been sustained by ideals of defending the North and upholding the White Australia policy, both discussed in Chapter Two. Evelyn Swan, of the Northern Division of the Country Women's Association, told the 1930 Commonwealth sugar inquiry, that sugar-growers' wives saw themselves as pioneers, responsible for "keeping their men on the land" and upholding "the traditions of Britain and standards of Australia".[1]

Joan Colebrook, who spent her childhood on the Atherton Tableland in the 1920s, reflected 60 years later on her father's clearing of the jungle for their farm. She said that the "destructive side" of settlement was not negotiable in these circumstances, "for although we were British we were Australian first, and to be Australian meant that one had to survive".[2] She recalled that, having stripped bare the jungle soil, neighbours helped each other to mould the new environment to overcome their "cash-poor" existence. The pioneers had "not only defended their terrain but extended themselves to include the most difficult and unrewarding aspects of terrain of others". The daughter of Edward William Hesketh Heale, a farmer and one-time Country Party candidate for State Parliament, Colebrook described the history of the

[1] *T.D.Bulletin,* 4 November, 1930, report of Townsville sittings of Committee of Inquiry Investigating the Position of Sugar in Australia.
[2] Joan Colebrook, *A House of Trees,* Chatto and Windus, London, 1988, P. 10.

tableland as a "plodding, mechanical story of people putting up shelters to keep out the wind, of planting grass and vegetables, of devising some way to bring water more conveniently from a stream". She remembered her father's pride in the efforts of farmers who improved their pastures, and his anger at the dilapidation of the State demonstration farm, which he blamed on party politics. [3]

Russel Ward, Ross Fitzgerald and William Lines have argued that pioneering, settling and farming were inimical to stewardship of the land. Ward's stringybark cockatoos proved themselves by scarring the landscape.[4] Fitzgerald's farmers were ruthless with natural resources in pursuit of profit.[5] Lines' settlers destroyed the bush in the name of progress.[6] These views seem to be corroborated by first-hand observations. Francis Ratcliffe concluded after his 1930 tour of the Atherton Tableland that Australians revelled in felling trees:

> It is the pulse of the pioneer still beating in their systems, I suppose. A man is leaving his mark on the earth's surface when he fells a hundred or two acres of forest to grow fruit or corn or green pastures for his cattle.[7]

Hector Dinning, a Stanthorpe farmer and amateur naturalist, wrote to the *Brisbane Courier* in 1927 that the Australian countryside had been scarred by what he described as the "passion for the short cut". Australians had no qualms about stripping bark from the nearest tree for a fowl house. "The quickest way to making money is chosen infallibly, regardless of all but the goal", and trees, rocks, birds and beasts suffered accordingly.[8]

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[3] *Ibid.,* p. 65, p. 72; The government opened a State Farm at Kairi in 1910, *QPP*, 1911-1912, vol 2 of 3, Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, p.1 [p. 793]
[4] Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend,* 1958 (1966 edition), p.5.
[5] Fitzgerald, From 1915*,* p. 388.
[6] William Lines, Great South Land*,* p. 41.
[7] Ratcliffe, Flying Fox*,* p.63.
[8] *Brisbane Courier,* 20 July, 1927.

Farming required a different mindset to pioneering, Queensland's Instructor in Tropical Agriculture Howard Newport observed in 1906. Trying to understand the "apathetic opposition" of North Queensland settlers to experimenting with new crops, he concluded pioneering had left them with a "spirit of conservatism". Newport saw this as a side-effect of hardships endured while clearing their land. They wanted the security of reliable staples, such as sugar and maize, not the uncertainty of experimenting with plants which could take several years to reach maturity and produce some income. The North needed "new blood" to discover and prove the profitability of alternatives, helped by the forgiving tropical climate:

> Though there is ample room and ample scope for felling and clearing, there is also, in the North, a by no means inconsiderable area of good land to be found on which the settler can start where the pioneer left off, and put in the plough, the seed drill, and reaping machine where the pioneer had perforce to use the hoe, his hands and his sickle.[9]

I shall argue in this chapter that farmers became stewards of their land while learning about droughts, floods, soil erosion, declining crop yields and competition from noxious insects and plants. Sugar millers and the State's agricultural experts helped them to survive these limiting factors with cultivation and irrigation hints, plant-breeding programs, pest-control schemes, cheap land and industry protection. Geoffrey Bolton, writing in 1963, argued that permanent white settlement of the North had hinged on farmers adapting to the environment, "husbanding the land" and co-operating in planning its development.[10] My thesis is that in addition to utilitarian motives, farmers also exercised stewardship of natural resources for aesthetic and sentimental reasons.

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[9] *QPP* 1906, vol 2 of 2, Department of Agriculture annual report, p. 55 [p.179]
[10] Bolton, A Thousand Miles,p.viii.

Closer-settlement restraints

Supporters of free selection in Victoria and New South Wales began campaigning for law reform in the 1850s, seeking relief from what the Land League of New South Wales called "the remorseless exactions of that class of men whose special and peculiar business is to reap where they have not sown … and to grind the faces of the poor".[11] The Crown Lands Alienation Act and Crown Lands Occupation Act, both enacted in NSW in 1861, can be seen as that colony's first, guarded attempts to throw open Crown lands for closer settlement. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Queensland governments liberalised land laws in the 1880s, intending to increase settlement by "small, bona fide farmers". Further legislation followed in the next three decades, with increasing rhetoric about the benefits of country life and the necessity of populating the state's empty spaces with industrious white Australian families.

However, the North's pioneers struggled to turn their tropical scrub blocks into farmland with axes, mattocks and shovels. The Under-Secretary for Agriculture Peter McLean found on a trip from Mackay and Port Douglas in 1888 that settlers faced many problems, beginning with clearing their land, because they were in many cases "unacquainted with agricultural pursuits".[12] In 1889, *The Townsville Herald* conceded difficulties in creating a "peasantry" in a new country, but argued that an "industrious yeomanry" was essential for nation-building. The newspaper saw agriculturists as great patriots, ready to suffer anything but severance from the soil

[11] Extract from *Manifesto of the Land League of New South Wales, 1859*, in Brian Dickey, *Politics in New South Wales 1856-1900,* North Melbourne, 1969, p. 34.
[12] *V&P* 1888, Report of Under Secretary for Agriculture, p. 795.

and equal to "the severest privations".[13] Perhaps Neils Christian Rosendahl, of Halifax, epitomised the stoicism that the *Herald* celebrated. Rosendahl told a sugar industry Royal Commission at Halifax in 1889 that he had not made any money in 15 years' growing vegetables and sugar, yet had not given up hope: "I cannot say I am very prosperous, but I should like to stick to it."[14] Another Herbert River district farmer, John Alm, told the inquiry that sugar production on his homestead block had declined by 50 per cent since 1886. He had suffered a great deal from fever, which he blamed on unhealthy new country and pinned his hopes on an experimental farm to teach him how to improve his position.[15] A correspondent to the *North Queensland Herald* in 1895, canvassing the prospects for cotton growing west of Townsville, described that district's settlers, himself included, as a "struggling and impecunious class" better known as "cockies", who followed each other like sheep until stumbling on a successful crop, then undersold each other at "unremunerative prices".[16]

Peter Griggs found in his study of the Burdekin sugar industry from 1880 to 1930 that the majority of 272 settlers who established farms in the Inkerman Repurchased Estate knew nothing about growing sugar cane. Clearing and cultivating had been labour-intensive, relying on horses, despite gradual mechanisation in the 1920s. [17] Walter Figg, an English bricklayer who drew one of the Inkerman blocks recalled many years later that he had grubbed, ploughed and planted by hand. He remembered the countryside being ringed by fires as selectors burnt fallen timber. The

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[13] *The Townsville Herald*, 26 January, 1889, p. 14, in an argument for improved irrigation in the Townsville district, prompted by preparations for Townsville hearings of the Royal Commission on Agriculture.
[14] *V&P*, vol II, Royal Commission on General Condition of the Sugar Industry in Queensland, pp. 202-203.
[15] *Ibid.,* pp.104-105 (pp.198-199)
[16] *North Queensland Herald,* 16 January, 1895.
[17] Peter Griggs, Plantation to Small Farm, A Historical Geography of the Lower Burdekin Sugar Industry, 1880-1930*,* PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1989, p.237; Roy Connolly, *Drysdale and the Burdekin*, Sydney, 1964, p.138.

farm did not pay for years, so he supported his family by bricklaying and eventually sold the farm and moved to town in 1928.[18]

William Ewart Gladstone Smith, secretary of the Haughton River Farmers Association told an inquiry in 1916 he considered 120ac (48ha) enough land for one man, allowing for 40ac (10ha) of cane, horse paddocks and fallowing, but warned that cane was the only crop that could be grown profitably in his district. "If we cannot grow cane, then we might just as well chuck up our lands," he said. [19]

Farmers in closer-settlement areas discovered problems which neither they nor the experts had expected. Steep hillside blocks, erosion and unsuitable pastures stymied many of the settlers in the State Government's Malaan subdivision on the edge of the Atherton Tableland, opened in 1953. The development went ahead despite a recommendation in 1947 that the country should stay under forestry, because of its topography and soil types.[20] Most of the would-be dairy farmers who drew blocks had to experiment with improved pastures, fertilisers and reduced stocking rates to cope with leaching of nutrients from their recently cleared red soil. Only five of twenty-four original settlers were still living in the Malaan in 1979.[21]

Theorists of closer settlement believed in the regenerative blessings of the bush and superiority of sunlit plains to foetid city air.[22] For example, a Government MP, J. E. Walker, told Parliament in 1930 he considered Australia was suffering from a lack of citizens who were "really wedded to the land", as peasants were in France and that action was needed to build up a virile, prosperous and contented rural

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[18] Ralph Jackson, *Salute to the Pioneers,* Ralph Jackson Enterprises, Home Hill, 1993, pp.59-62.
[19] *QPP*, 1917-1919, vol 2 of 3, Report of the Board of Inquiry Into the Sugar Industry, p.235 (p.1095).
[20] Leonard Webb, "The Rape of the Forests", in A.J. Marshall (ed), *The Great Extermination,* Heinemann, London, 1966, p. 172.
[21] Kevin J. Frawley, *The Malaan Group Settlement North Queensland 1954, An Historical Geography*, Campbell, ACT, 1987, p.106. Frawley believed that in any rational land-use policy the steeper country would have been left under original rainforest cover (p.130).
[22] A.B. Paterson, *Clancy of the Overflow*, first published in *The Bulletin*, 1889.

population.[23] This was an old hope of attaining what George Seddon, borrowing from E.M. Forster, called "harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them", and of taking a step closer to Eden. It was a contradictory but popular ideology, containing faith in the inspiration of the beauty of nature which the settler was obliged to transform. Charles Bryde wrote in *From Chart House to Bush Hut* of opening a dairy farming block on the Atherton Tablelands, in the World War I era:

> The spirit of the romance of pioneering took possession of us. We were the only inhabitants of a new-found beautiful world; we were shipwrecked on an unspoiled Pre-Adamite island; we were, well – just a couple of enthusiastic bush lovers with some ability to appreciate the beauty of old mother Nature.[24]

His alter ego saw no irony in pausing under a shady tree, to inhale the "characteristic pleasant, sweet smell of the fresh-fallen scrub". "We have been working hard, and have appetites that many townies having forgotten what it is like to be naturally, healthily hungry, refer to as savage or voracious," he asserted. [25]

The closer settlement movement was a social reformer's quest for equilibrium between man and nature, driven by the rumoured peace and gentility of an ancient form of British village life. English essayist H.J. Massingham articulated this nostalgia for the village green in an essay in 1938 on how the enclosure of common lands by wealthy landholders in the late eighteenth century had robbed the countryside of its solvency, industries, civilisation, beauty and tranquillity:

> The ruin of the peasantry in the 18th century has been followed by the ruin of the land in the 20th. Defenceless, its weedy fields with their skinny hedges and choked ditches, its desecrated woods and dales, polluted rivers and deserted hills, lie open to a horde

[23] *QPD*, vol CLV, 1930, 2nd sess 25th Pmt, p. 6.
[24] C.W. Bryde, *From Chart House to Bush Hut: Being the record of a Sailor's 7 Years in the Queensland bush*, Melbourne, undated, p.102.
[25] *Ibid.,* p. 62.

> of speculators whose rape far exceeds in violence the worst excesses of the old barbarian invaders.[26]

Queensland's legislators were still advocating closer-settlement farming schemes in the 1950s, despite a world-wide trend to mechanisation, rationalisation and labour-shedding driven by trade liberalisation and the growth of food processing oligopolies. Farmers struggled with dairying in the Malaan scheme on the Atherton Tableland and with tobacco-growing in the Clare soldier settlement subdivision in the Burdekin district. In 1960, the owner-editor of *The Home Hill Observer*, Tom Jackson, echoed the *Townville Herald* of 1889. In stating his case for populating the North, he quoted Reverend Francis Clarke on the need for Australia and America to become filled with small landholders, "each cultivating his own little piece of God's earth".[27]


NORTH QUEENSLAND REGISTER
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NORTHERN MINING REGISTER
MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 1912.
CURRENT NOTES.

The masthead of The North Queensland Register, 1912

During the 1930s, a decade of low prices and production controls, the *North Queensland Register* depicted farmers as settlers with modest dreams, content with frugal lives. Journalist Alexander Vennard portrayed farmers who made a virtue of

[26] H.J.Massingham, "Our Inheritance From The Past", in Clough Williams-Ellis, *Britain and the Beast*, London, 1938, pp.30-31. Harold John Massingham (1888-1952) was regarded as a "passionate advocate of the value of living close to nature", *The Times,* London, 25 June, 1952, quoted in *Obituaries from the Times, 1951-1960*, Reading, England, 1979, p 490.
[27] *The Home Hill Observer*, 18 November, 1960.

thinking small, and who faced poverty and fate cheerfully. Writing under the pen name of Maurice Deane in "Children's Corner" in 1931, he told a cautionary story of an Everyman small farmer and a money lender. "Jack", a young man upset at the failure of pumpkin and potato crops, is lectured by his sister. She thinks he is too ambitious, like their late father was, to ever do anything properly. Jack is chastened and decides to cut his plantings from twelve acres to five. He declines a cheap loan on a "little mortgage" from a neighbour who tells him he is making a big mistake in not expanding. "Everyone should branch out," says the neighbour, whom Vennard describes as well-to-do. Jack ploughs and harrows his five acres, plants tomatoes and has his hands full with a successful crop. The would-be money lender is grumpy when they meet again. The local storekeeper congratulates Jack for working within his means. Jack says he is glad he didn't take the loan, otherwise the farm would have been in his neighbour's hands before long.[28]

Vennard celebrated the small farmer's modest dreams and respect for the land learnt through experience. Writing as Bill Boyang in the *Register's* "On The Track" column, he defended "Dad, Mum and Dave" in 1937 against a light-hearted charge by the Minister for Agriculture, Frank Bulcock, that Steele Rudd's characters were anachronisms in the age of scientific farming:

> It is all innocent fun and does not annoy Dad or Mum, who laugh at the jests concerning themselves just as heartily as does anyone else.[29]

Vennard's humorous characters included "Paddy O'Giru", of the Burdekin, who ran his car on crocodile fat after running short of petrol,[30] and an "old cocky" from the same district, who was as "proud as a dog with two tails" of his best cane crop in 40

[28] *N.Q. Register*, 10 October, 1931.
[29] *Ibid.,* "On The Track", 29 July, 1937. The column also carried a poem by Ernest Gregory, of Innisfail, praising Dad as the archetypal Primary Producer, who could "milk his ten cows in an hour, and then swing the axe all day long".
[30] *N.Q. Register,* On The Track, 18 June, 1932.

years, then lost it all in a flash flood and sea of mud.[31] He promoted the bush as a wholesome, happy alternative to city life, a view ironically presented in his On The Track column in 1934 in a poem called Who'd Be a Ringbarker?, by E.B. Chardon, of Dingo:

> But the air is sweet and fragrant,
> With gorgeous bushland blooms
> And the shining star of hopefulness
> On our horizon looms
> And if ever there's talk of quitting,
> Our answer's always No!
> We `whackers surely have the joys
> The town folks never know.[32]

Charles Bryde's book, *From Chart House to Bush Hut,* containing advice for "scratching out a living in the scrub", and Ralph Jackson's collection of pioneering stories, collected in the sixties but not published until 1993, belong to the same discourse.[33] However, Jean Devanny presented a less salubrious version of closer settlement in her stories about pioneers and the children of pioneers, written during World War II. The jungle seems on the verge of revenge and a farmer's wife dreams of the enchantments of town life in two of these stories. Devanny told of visiting a neglected cane farm near Gordonvale where fruit trees were being engulfed by lantana and second-generation regrowth and merging into a "creeper-blanketed jungle". Cane toads had eaten the honey bees and couch grass was spreading through cow pastures. The owner told her that three of his four children were serving in the armed forces. He cut, burnt and mattocked the farm into being from virgin forest country, but now felt

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[31] *Ibid.,* 6 June, 1931.
[32] *N.Q.Register,* 7 July, 1934, *"Who'd be a Ringbarker"*, in "On The Track", p.62.
[33] Bryde, Chart House, p.157; Ralph Jackson, *Salute to the Pioneers - Biographies of Pioneers of the Home Hill as told to Ralph Jackson,* Home Hill, 1993.

buried alive by debts, and dreamt of a more comfortable life. In a second story, Devanny introduced an Atherton Tableland farmer's wife and her son who were growing carrots, unhappily, for the army. The son said his mother, a former nurse, "cut timber like a man" to help clear the farm and deserved better than problems with war-time bureaucrats. Devanny recounted the mother's fancy that she had sometimes seen "a lingering mirage upon the distant hills" after a summer storm, with "steeples of a church pointing to the sky" and steps leading up to houses. The image, whether hers or invented by Devanny, suggests discontentment with her farm life and a desire for a more comfortable, man-made landscape than her surroundings on the tableland.[34]

Italian farmers

Settlers interviewed during a census of Italian Catholics in the Ingham Parish in 1923 praised the rich soil of the coastal belt, but had little to say about stewardship. They said they had come intending to make money and return home, but had become bound to Australia by their financial interest in land and the freedom and peacefulness of the country. In some cases, the deaths of loved ones had left them with less reason to return. The Australian papal delegate's representative, the Very Reverend Father Mambrini, visited 1902 Italians and concluded that:

> The Italians left their country to try their luck. As soon as they arrive they see the possibility of making money provided they work hard for it. The result is that they work more like slaves than human beings. Some work from 4am till dark, with a few hours rest on account of the tropical heat. [35]

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[34] Jean Devanny, *Bird of Paradise,* Sydney, 1945, pp.28-55.
[35] Father Mambrini, *Report of A Two Months' Visit to the Italian Settlement on the Herbert River,* Sydney, Mitchell Library, 1968 typescript of 1923 original. Father Mambrini, who was

Father Mambrini observed that the settlers used their "day of rest" for repairing machinery, washing, mending and writing letters, not attending church. They confessed to having sold body and soul to farming in North Queensland. The beauty of their old homeland seemed inconsequential. "What does it matter to me if it is [beautiful]," a young man told him. "I can't live on beauty." His assessment of their spiritual condition was that they "did not run much after pleasure", but could not resist the temptation of making money. They lived by the material ideals of their Australian neighbours and were too busy for God. Nevertheless, he felt they were not as pagan as they pretended and that they had a real faith, albeit a dormant one.

The *Queenslander* newspaper's typical Italian labourer was a "true capitalist", who worked methodically to gain land. Gangs of labourers pooled resources for one of their members to pay a deposit on a farm, then shared their labour until they had saved enough for the next purchase. Following this discipline all eventually became farm owners. "The Italian labourer realises that his body is capital, as much as the farmer thinks of his farm or his money in the bank as capital," the newspaper said in 1919.[36] The *Queenslander* had praised, 20 years earlier, the Italian settlers' ability to make the land profitable.[37] A farmer from the Macknade mill district, Giusto Basso, told a Sydney-based Italian-language newspaper in 1907 that any labourer serious about his work could save enough for a small farm and become his own master. "The soil is magnificent," he said.[38]

Mario Cristaudo, the son of Sicilian migrant Alfio Cristaudo, who established a farm in the Herbert River district with two partners about 1911, considered that his

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on assignment for Australia's papal delegate, recommended appointment of a specially trained priest with a roving mission among the Italians.

[36] *Queenslander,* 8 March, 1919, quoted by Ferando Galassi, *Sotto La Croce del Sud, Under the Southern Cross,* Townsville, 1991, pp. 184-185.

[37] *Queenslander*, 31 July, 1899.

[38] *L'Italo-Australiano,* 30 November 1907, p.2, quoted by Galassi, p. 184.

father worked intuitively. "Our people came from the land," he said in an interview in 2000. "You didn't have to teach them a thing." He considered farmers in this era had taken care of the land, and he had followed suit.[39] For example, he and his father had controlled water erosion by planting beans as ground cover:

> Well, we used to have some [erosion] … Yes, sometimes some of the land would wash away … We became aware of that, eventually we saw it wasn't the right thing to do, so we'd leave bean cover on the land. That used to stop the erosion. It was like a raincoat.[40]

They planted their beans in August, ploughed them in as green manure and usually had a second, self-seeded crop each November. Cristaudo, who joined his father as a partner in 1938, said the assignment quota system from 1929 to 1964, limiting farmers to planting 75 per cent of their properties, had "given the land a spell". "In those days the old people had more sense than the young ones, the idea was to look after your land then."[41]

Samuel Griffith appears to have regarded the first 333 Italians recruited by the Queensland government in 1891 as potential small farmers as well as indentured labourers to replace South Sea Islanders. Many were indentured to work on plantations in the Burdekin and Herbert River districts.[42] Griffith described them as members of a "scientific, horticultural and agricultural race", who would help make tropical agriculture pay because of their experience with irrigation.[43] The *North Queensland Herald* hoped that the Italians could further the transformation of the

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[39] Mario Cristaudo, interviewed by Ian Frazer, Ingham, 4 February, 2000, in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] Galassi, Southern Cross, p. 75, records that 153 of the Italians who arrived in Townsville on the *Jumna* in December, 1891 were sent to the Burdekin and 113 to Herbert River plantations.
[43] *QPD* 1891, vol. 64, p.78; p.899, cited by Galassi, p. 48.

industry from large plantations to small farms and central mills.[44] The *Queenslander* suggested that the migrants might become "useful colonists" and spread their knowledge on other profitable agricultural pursuits, such as cultivating olives and rearing silkworms.[45] The government removed one of the main pretexts for recruiting the Italians within months of their revival when instead of banning South Sea Island labour it extended the controversial system by 10 years.

The Canecutters Memorial in Innisfail is a telling symbol of the sugar industry in the North. Commissioned by the town's Italian community in 1959 to celebrate Queensland's centenary, this life-size, bare-chested, white marble figure is shaded by a sheaf of cane over one shoulder which looks, at a distance, like the wing of a guardian angel, a testimony to the industry of the Italian labourers who made the district prosper. [46] Perhaps it confirms Father Mambirini's insight into their secular spirituality.

Chinese farmers

Chinese farmers gained a name for conscientiousness during the decades up to Federation when they were a ubiquitous presence in the North. However, they were also known for exhausting the soils in which they grew maize and bananas.[47]

Witnesses to the 1897 Royal Commission into Land Settlement attested to the success of the Chinese on the Atherton Tableland. "Asiatics" worked about half of the district's 110 agricultural farms, the Herberton district Crown Lands Commissioner Adam Cuppage Haldane told the inquiry. Chinese and Japanese farmers leased land

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[44] *North Queensland Herald,* 16 December, 1891 [p. 10].
[45] *Queenslander,* 5 December 1891 [p. 1066].
[46] Kay Cohen, Margaret Cook, Howard Pearce, *Heritage Trails of the Tropical North,* Brisbane, 2001, p.128.
[47] Cathie May, *Topsawyers, The Chinese in Cairns, 1870-1920,* Studies in North Queensland History, No 6, JCU, 1984, p. 17.

from owners who claimed there was no demand for their produce and that farming did not pay.[48] Another witness, William Bernard Kelly, of Atherton, a farmer with 15 years' experience in the district, regarded Chinese as the best tenants because they were "plodding and industrious". Asked to compare the effectiveness of Chinese and European methods of working the land, he said the Chinese approach, using a hoe for cultivation, was best in recently cleared scrub land. However, he believed Europeans would prevail when they had the means and opportunity for mechanical cultivation. Kelly said he knew of four Chinese farmers who had made money and returned to China.[49] The Chinese succeeded, according to Crown Lands ranger John Jones Byers, because they were prepared to "hawk their produce about", in the absence of cheap transport to Cairns and Mareeba.[50] William Marrane, a farmer in the district for 17 years, said he scarified his part-cleared land by hoe to grow wheat, oats, lucerne and maize. Indirectly endorsing the Chinese approach, he said he considered ploughing unnecessary. However, he added that production costs were high in the absence of modern machinery. "Everything is done with the hand and the hoe," he said. Stumps could be removed after five or six years.[51] Chinese growers produced up to three-quarters of the maize grown in the Atherton district up to the end of World War I.[52]

The inquiry gives some general insights into the status of "farmers", "agriculturists", "selectors" and "settlers". Crown Lands Commissioner Haldane regarded the European land-owners as the district's "real farmers", possibly because the Chinese had been banned from owning land directly under the 1876 Land Act. However, William Marrane considered the Chinese were the district's "principal agriculturists". "There are only about two men in the Atherton district who are what I

[48] R.C on Land Settlement, 1897, p.132 (p.1050).
[49] *Ibid.,* pp. 136-138 (pp. 1054-1056).
[50] *Ibid.,* p.135 (p.1053).
[51] *Ibid.,* p.142 (p.1060).
[52] May, Topsawyers, p.36.

call agriculturists," he said. Most selectors had taken up their land as a speculation and took outside jobs in preference to hard work on their farms. [53]

The Chinese brought skills in tropical agriculture developed in small villages in coastal south China.[54] These methods irritated Queensland's US-trained Inspector of Agriculture Edward Shelton, who complained in 1895 that tobacco-growing had been "relegated to the most conservative class of the population – the Chinese". Their approach to growing and preserving tobacco was out of date. He was alarmed that they also dominated rice production.[55] However, the Under-Secretary of the Department of Agriculture Peter McLean found reasons to praise the Chinese he encountered on his tours of the North. He asserted in 1888 that Chinese labourers had cleared all agricultural land on rivers and creeks in the Cairns district. In 1893, reporting on a visit to Hughenden, west of Townsville, he reflected on "the superiority of the Chinaman over the average European in northern Queensland agriculture". McLean, who had once farmed in Scotland and southern Queensland, told of having met a dairy farmer who had let a portion of his land to a Chinese market gardener. The Chinaman had sunk two wells and was irrigating good crops of potatoes and other vegetables with liberal quantities of water, while the dairy farmer had turned out his cows, for want of food, despite his tenant showing him "how to grow the green stuff". [56]

The success of Chinese market gardens caused affront to some civic leaders in Charters Towers and Cairns. The Mayor of Charters Towers, John Asher Benjamin, told an inquiry in 1900, that Charters Towers was "wholly dependent" on poor-

[53] R.C. on Land Settlement, 1897, p.140 (p.1058).
[54] May, Topsawyers, p.5.
[55] *V&P* 1895, Vol III, Report of Instructor in Agriculture, p.1028.
[56] *V&P*, 1888, Annual Report of Queensland Under Secretary for Agriculture, p. 795; *V&P*, 1893, vol III, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for 1892-93, p.915; *Queensland 1900,* Brisbane, pp. 58-59.

quality, Chinese-grown fruit and vegetables, in the absence of produce from the coast. The Town Clerk, Henry Bleasdale Walker hinted that Chinese farmers employed unspeakable methods to force their crops. “If people knew anything about the manure used in forcing these vegetables they would not eat them, and being forced and not naturally grown they are of very little use,” he said.[57] The Chinese were also sometimes criticised for cropping their soil to the point of exhaustion, Cathie May found in her study. May argued that they extracted the maximum return in the shortest time, regardless of the damage, because they had no long-term interest in the land.[58]

White Australia policy laws after Federation curbed but did not entirely stifle Chinese farming. Chinese market gardeners were still operating in the Burdekin district in the 1920s. In 1933, more than half the 627 Chinese-born residents of the coastal strip from Bowen to Cairns lived in Townsville, Cairns or Johnstone Shire, centred on Innisfail.[59] There had been 2562 in the region in 1901.[60]

Farming ethics

Farmers made choices about clearing, cultivating, sowing, fertilising, harvesting and fallowing based on short and long-term goals, and their knowledge of land and climate. They learnt natural limits through the cycle of wet and dry years. A Russian settler living in Ingham observed in 1936 that Australians were generally gamblers with nature, “extravagant and not very saving” in bountiful times, although

[57] *V&P* 1990, vol.III, Royal Commission on Bowen railway extension, p. 608.
[58] May, Topsawyers, p.17, citing *Cairns Post,* 10 August, 1889, and Department of Agriculture and Stock annual report, 1907, comparing the “careful methods of cultivation” of Chinese market gardeners with the ruthless approach of banana growers who cropped until the soil was exhausted, then moved on.
[59] Chinese farmers were reported to be cultivating land on Plantation Creek, near Ayr, in 1926, *N.Q.Register,* 4 October, 1926, p.40; *Census of Commonwealth of Australia 1933; QPP* 1929, vol II, No. II, Report of Registrar-General on Agricultural Production, p. 203 (p. 819).
[60] May, Topsawyers, p.10

always careful of water.[61] Most, depending solely on income from cane, based their land-management decisions on utilitarian reasoning, sometimes influenced by aesthetic, sentimental or ecological criteria.

For example, Burdekin grower Les Searle, who began farming with his father, Joshua Searle, on 100ac (40ha) in 1944, considered farmers then had been conscious of maintaining productivity through practices which would now be called "conservation" and "sustainability". The government had helped by setting Burdekin farm sizes at a liveable area for a family. He regretted the advent of larger farms with no houses and the transformation of farming from a "life-style" to a business:

> On my first visit to the bank manager with my father, he [the manager] said, "you grow the cane and I will look after the money". That does not happen today.[62]

Bill and Laura Scott, of Home Hill, quit their respective jobs as a teacher and radio presenter to grow tomatoes, cucumbers and cane on the 160ac farm they bought in 1953. Mr Scott, originally from Brisbane, worked at a district sugar mill to supplement income from small crops, cattle and poultry until they received a cane assignment in 1963. He reluctantly cleared blue gum, Moreton Bay Ash and Leichhardt trees to plant the cane:

> I knew what was there [in the scrub] and what we've lost. We used to have populations of the little squirrel gliders here. They've gone. Nightjars have gone. Koalas have gone. Not that we had koalas here, but koalas further down … I don't see any of the big brown pythons anymore, they used to grow up to 12 foot long, over

[61] Leandro Illin, letter to *The Herbert River Express,* 22 December, 1936, in Elena Govor, *My Dark Brother,* Sydney, 2000, p.273

[62] Correspondence, Les Searle to Ian Frazer, 29 November, 1999. Farmers produced five times more in 1999 than in the 1950s, he said and employees were much better trained in use of chemicals, water and economical use of fertilisers.

> in the swamps. A lot of water birds have gone for the reason that a lot of swamps are now covered with para grass.[63]

Mr Scott, who described himself as a gardener at heart, rotary-hoed cane tops back into the soil instead of burning them, and sometimes grew ground-cover crops. He believed all genuine farmers then and now had wanted to look after their soil and consequently had taken notice of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations and Department of Primary Industries. However, his motivation had come from his religion:

> We are Christians here. We believe in God's command to look after the land. Looking after the land means to me not going contrary to what is natural. I was a person who never went and dug a tree out for the sake of digging trees. I know people who will hop on a bulldozer because there is a tree half a mile down the creekbank and go and bang it down because it's there … to me that is destroying the natural.

He said he and his wife and eight children had seen the farm as a way of life, not a means of getting ahead. While not feeling any great affinity with the flat country of the Burdekin Delta, he believed he understood the seasons. Cyclones such as the ones that hit Ayr in 1956 and 1958 were frightening but brought rain to replenish the aquifer, under strain because of cane farming.[64]

Stewardship of the land sometimes grew from the farmer's sense of belonging to a particular place. This dimension of land-ownership was discussed by the Apostolic delegate to Australia, Archbishop P. Bernardini, at the opening of St Teresa's Agricultural College at Abergowrie near Ingham in 1934. Archbishop Bernardini contrasted the stability of agriculture with the impermanence and mining. When a mine closed people "left without regret a land they have never loved".

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[63] Bill and Laura Scott, interview, Home Hill, 13 January, 2002, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.
[64] *Ibid.*

However, the agriculturist loved his land because it was his own, carrying the hopes of his family. The difficulties and sacrifices which it demanded rendered it dearer to him.[65]

Did farmers stay long enough to get this sense of "home" in North Queensland? Peter Griggs found evidence of a rapid turn-over in farm ownership in the Burdekin during the 1920s. Only 155, or 34 per cent of the district's 451 canegrowers supplying mills in 1921 were still doing so in 1930.[66] The trend can also be seen in Inkerman mill assignments, where only 24 per cent of surnames on the 1929 cane assignment list remained in 1970. The proportion was slightly higher, 29 per cent at Mourilyan mill, in the Johnstone River district, and higher again at the Victoria and Macknade mills in the Herbert River Valley, between 1936 and 1970, with 38 per cent and 43 per cent respectively. The figures suggest the Macknade district was one of the most stable. The average Macknade assignment size increased from 84ac to 94ac from 1929 to 1970, and the proportion of small assignments, smaller than 50ac, declined from 22 per cent to 4.5 per cent.[67] Farmers' children left to find their own land, or in search of easier lives. For example, Don River Delta farmer Gideon Pott told an inquiry in 1900 his six sons had left the district, two of them bound for South Africa, because there was no market for fruit and fodder from the family property.[68]

Albert and Amy Pennisi, of Tully, appear to have nursed their flood-prone land into productivity through an approach to land management based on their love of the farm and its creatures. They bought the then run-down, 80ac (32ha) farm in 1947,

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[65] *N.Q. Register,* 28 July, 1934, p.37. The Catholic Church invested 9000 pounds in the college and a 23,000ac (9200ha) farm, which, according to the Bishop Terry McGuire, of Townsville, was to produce "cultured men of the land with cultured farms and cultured minds".
[66] Griggs, Plantation to Small Farm, p.407.
[67] Figures for Mourilyan, Macknade, Victoria and Inkerman mills based on a comparison of cane assignments, recorded annually in the *Queensland Government Gazette.*
[68] R.C.Into Proposed Railway Extensions, Bowen, 30 April, 1900, p.585.

followed by 126ac (60ha) from neighbours in 1949, to save trees which the neighbours were "crashing" and burning. Birds in trees beside a lagoon had subsequently helped to control pests, while timber from fallen trees had been handy for woodworking and building. Albert Pennisi's "saving" philosophy included use of legumes and trash as green manure, fallowing at least 30ac (12ha) of cropping land and protecting birds, fish, eels and turtles. They were loath to sell the farm after 53 years because the new owners might cut down three big old ti-trees from the lagoon.[69]

Other farmers interviewed about their experiences as pioneer settlers said little directly about stewardship, but implied they had succeeded with a patient, use-wisely approach to growing sugar. Soldier-settler Bill Wales, a pioneer of the Abergowrie district, 30 miles upstream from Ingham, believed he had benefited from his agricultural lineage. The son and grandson of cane farmers from Calen near Mackay, he had worked as a bulldozer driver before drawing his block. Interviewed at Abergowrie in 2001, he said he had cleared rain-forest trees from his 100ac (25ha) block from 1952 onwards before planting cane, helped by his wife, a canefarmer's daughter. He saved some of the fallen timber to build their house and sheds. The Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations and miller CSR Ltd had developed a variety of cane for his rich ground. His story was one of succeeding against the odds:

> You've got to be suitable for the land, there's no good of you being a storekeeper and saying you're going to go farming, no way. You've got to be brought up on the land and know what it's like, know what you've got to put up with. You've got to be patient. We were patient for a long time on the farm. Now we own it.[70]

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[69] Albert and Amy Pennisi, interview, Tully, 16 July, 2001, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.
[70] Bill Wales, interview, Abergowrie, 23 March, 2001, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU

Wales was proud of having succeeded despite scepticism in Ingham: "They basically thought we wasn't farmers. We wasn't Italians. The town here was 99 per cent Italian, Ingham."[71]

Another of the district's 40 soldier-settlers, Herb Wallis, told a similar story. He saved blue gum and Moreton Bay Ash trunks for the house he built for his wife and five children. The Agricultural Bank and Commonwealth Government carried them for the first 18 months and he cleared the whole 100ac in the next 15 years. They grew vegetables and fished in Gowrie Creek, which adjoined the farm. They only took what they needed when fishing:

> We practised that all our life, letting them go in the water and consequently there was always some there. It's changed now because people come out from town, walk up the creek fishing and take them all home.[72]

Joe Wilkinson, also soldier-settler, was aware of burning good timber as he cleared his blue gum, blackbutt, mahogany and ti tree country, but was too busy to stop. "You couldn't afford to concentrate on them because you were too busy trying to clear it and get it ready for planting," he said. His wife, like Bill Wales's, helped with the planting. They planted "every square inch" with cane:

> In those days the farm work was pretty labourious, one thing after another. Plough it, rip it, disc it, nowadays they've cut their farming practices way down, nothing like what we used to do.

He knew the Herbert River had been polluted by sludge from tin mines on the tableland in the 1950s, but still caught barramundi and sometimes went fishing and crabbing around Cardwell with Bill Wales.[73]

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[71] Bill Wales, interview, Ingham, 23 March, 2001, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection.
[72] Herb Wallis, interview, Abergowrie, 13 March, 2000, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.
[73] Joe Wilkinson, interview, Ingham, 13 March, 2000, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.

Former Sicilian vineyard worker Domenico Domanti, who moved to the Burdekin district in 1957 said he regretted some of his farming practices, in retrospect. “We spoilt everything, you know,” he said in an interview in Ayr in 2000. “Development has to go, you can’t stop that, but there has got to be a restriction what you can do and can’t do.”[74] Mr Domanti considered his Burdekin farm a platform for self-improvement and ensuring good careers for his children. He thought he had a good life in the hills and mountains of Sicily until an American who had married his grandmother appeared one day and told him he would be better off anywhere else in the world. It had been an achievement to buy a 1500ac (600ha) farm in the Burdekin with his brother-in-law in 1957, and another 200ac (90ha) in the 1960s. He was deaf from driving heavy machinery while clearing. While he had expanded because of economies of scale in irrigation, fertiliser and harvesting, the compulsory resting of 25 per cent of land was worthwhile. Looking back, fishing trips with his wife had been one of his greatest pleasures. They went out almost every week, after little fish like whiting, and sometime to the reef. His wife had since died and there were fewer fish in the creeks now, and too many professional fisherman chasing barramundi.

Some settlers showed awareness of the environmental impact of farming in their evidence to The Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland in 1931.[75] The 248 witnesses, from the Daintree to Townsville, and later in Brisbane, included 80 or so farmers.

George Hopkins, secretary of Ingham Chamber of Commerce, gave evidence on behalf of John Fisher, an Ingham health inspector, about the practice of fattening pigs on bulgaroo swamp country south-east of the town. Hopkins read a statement

[74] Domenico Domanti, interview, Ayr, 11 February, 2000, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.
[75] R.C. Development of North Queensland, p.1. The commission recommended an increase in the area of forest reservations and National Parks in the Far North from 971,312ac to 1.3 million ac and make available for settlement an area of 75,000ac.

from Fisher, who said he had been running cattle and pigs on a 1700ac (680ha) selection for 13 years. The pigs thrived on a diet of the wetlands yams. He advocated establishment of a bacon factory to process pigs fattened on bulgaroo in the thousands of acres of swamp along the coast from Saltwater Creek to the Herbert River. He had considered the possibility of the pigs eventually destroying the bulgaroo, but felt this would not happen:

> Feeding on them by the pigs does not seem to kill them out, the opposite being the case. The rooting up of the swamps appears to have a similar effect to ploughing and promotes a more vigorous growth during the wet season when the plants rehabilitate themselves.[76]

Charles Wallace Wentworth, chairman of Thuringowa Shire Council, voiced what the *Register* called "profound disapproval" of ruthless cutting of timber by sleeper cutters on selectors' properties near Woodstock, west of Townsville. These casual labourers were spoiling the settlers' grass and he advocated giving the sleeper contract to the selectors.[77]

Vivian Tealby, a sugar and pineapple grower from Rollingstone, complained about the lack of markets for his fruit and said that the people of Townsville did not realise the value of timber at the back of Hervey's Range. It had been growing and rotting for millions of years and should be cut when it matured, he said.[78] Cattle grazing appears to have been in decline in the Rollingstone district, because of over-stocking and pressure on native grasses.[79]

Arthur West, a manager and mixed farmer from Millaa Millaa advocated group settlement schemes such as the one which had given him a start at the Beatrice

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[76] *N.Q. Register*, 13 June, 1931.
[77] *T.D. Bulletin*, 25 July, 1931.
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui, *Thirty-Three Miles to Rollingstone,* Thuringowa, 2003, citing L. Henderson, *More Than Rates Roads and Rubbish: A history of local government in action in Thuringowa Shire, 1879-1985,* PhD Thesis, James Cook University, Townsville, 1992, p.57.

River, on the tableland. But men with experience, or capital should get preference. The worst feature of the Beatrice scheme had been its "lack of practical men and surplus of theorists". Luckily the theorists had since mostly gone away.[80]

Robert Samuel Griffith, a farmer and director of the Malanda Butter Factory, agreed all accessible areas should be open for settlement, but cautioned against denuding timber. The authorities should leave the timber to "the right type of man, who puts the value of his timber back to the land." He disagreed with the head of the Royal Commission William Payne that only 50 per cent of available blocks in the Malanda district had been developed, but conceded poor roads were a problem. He argued against opening more coastal districts for dairying, when the tableland industry was being carried by selectors' wives and families.[81]

Edmund Banfield was able to take a much different approach to that of cane and dairy farmers when he settled his homestead block on Dunk Island in 1897. Banfield, a member of the Townsville Pastoral and Agricultural Association, the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union and Field Naturalists Society of Victoria[82], resolved to "tread lightly", limiting himself to "considerate and slight" interference[83] when he and his Aboriginal labourers began clearing. How much intrusion into the wilderness was too much? He decided on four and a half acres (1.7ha) of his 320ac (128ha) block, for tropical fruits, vegetables, maize, millet, poultry, running goats and horses. He and his wife fed themselves and sold the surplus in Townsville, Cardwell, Geraldton (later Innisfail) and Cairns. Described by his friend George Barrymore as an "ardent North Queenslander",[84] Banfield championed the North to British readers as a both place to "draw near to nature" and "a fruitful country, capable of producing

[80] *N.Q. Register,* 27 June, 1931.
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] Michael Noonan, *A Different Drummer*, St Lucia, 1983, p.134.
[83] E. J. Banfield, *The Confessions of a Beachcomber*, Sydney, 1968, p15, p26.
[84] *T.D. Bulletin*, 7 June, 1923, obituary by "Cestus" George Barrymore's pen-name.

food and immense wealth, and giving employment to millions." He did not want it to become a "desolate and silent wilderness", neglected by politicians from temperate Australia. He argued that settlers could grow rubber, cotton, rice, tobacco and fibre plants, although the demise of cheap coloured labour had increased production costs: "We want population to eat our produce, and then there will be no complaint." [85]

Nature in the tropics was generous and forgiving and perhaps demanded rapport rather than rules of engagement:

> Kill, burn and destroy her primeval jungle, and she does not give way to sadness and despair, nor are any of her infinite resources abated … Nature needs only to be restrained and schooled and her response is an abundance of various sorts of food for man.[86]

He wrote sympathetically of settlers who did *not* grow sugar cane, did not employ labour and who depended almost solely "upon their own hard hands". One always carried a butterfly net to his maize field and had turned his home into a natural history museum. Others collected eggs, studied botany and photography. Many were great readers, "knowing and knowledgeable". Thomas and Daisy Broom, English migrants who settled on Poole Island, near Bowen, in 1934, were in the same category, content with subsistence living supplemented by some casual jobs.[87] Likewise Charles Richard Collyer, a merchant seaman and inventor, took up a selection at Clump Point in 1923 and supported his family by working on the railways and for Johnston Shire Council. He was described in his obituary as an experimenter in botany who learnt to love the scrub lands, their singing creeks and the peace of the blue hills.[88] Banfield

[85] Banfield, Confessions, pp.xvi; 47, 43.
[86] *Ibid.,* p.42.
[87] *T.D Bulletin*, 25 January, 2003.
[88] *Johnstone River Advocate,* 30 May, 1939.

considered maize, fruit and coffee growers in tropical Queensland to be living more comfortably than the average settler in any other part of Australia.[89]

Co-operative approaches to drainage, erosion, pest-control, education

Neighbours shared their stewardship of the land by working together informally and through producers' organisations, to drain swamps, repair eroded gullies and control pests. The Herbert River Farmers Association appears to have established an experimental farm for tea and coffee-growing in the 1880s, but lacked funds to continue after two years.[90] Cane growers downstream from Ingham combined at the end of a wet 1930 to clear debris from Cordelia Creek, plough shallow drains before the next wet season and plan to jointly drain the Forest Home area. Waterlogging had cut their yield by up to 40 per cent since 1928.[91] Farmers later discovered that reclaiming swampy ground interfered with stream flow and opposed the practice. In 1963, when the State Government granted 100 new cane assignments to the Herbert River region, representatives of the miller and growers from the Macknade district disagreed over turning wet, low-lying coastal land into cane paddocks. The miller won.[92]

Canegrowers worked together formally in Cane Pest and Disease Control Boards, established in the 1930s, and through representation on cane prices' boards (1915) and mill suppliers' committees (1922).[93] The pest boards co-ordinated

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[89] Banfield, Confessions, p.42.
[90] R.C.on Sugar Industry, 1889, evidence of Charles Watson, p.111 (p. 205).
[91] Bob Shepherd, *The Herbert River Story, The Second Fifty Years*, 1980, pp.139-140; *N.Q. Register*, 22 February, 1936.Farmers in the Airdmillan district of the Burdekin Delta combined the in the late 1940s to build a weir on Plantation Creek to stem the flow of saltwater (Correspondence, Les Searle to Ian Frazer, 29 November, 1999).
[92] Vince Vitale (Sen), interview, Ingham, 2 February, 2000, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection. Mr Vitale represented the Macknade mill suppliers' committee on the district expansion committee. "It was a thankless job," he said.
[93] A.F. Bell, "Some Notes on the History and Development of the Sugar Industry", in *The Australian Sugar Yearbook,* Brisbane, 1950, pp.21-22. The cane pest and disease control

campaigns against cane beetles and rats and also checked crops for contagious diseases. Children trapped rats and caught cane beetles for pocket money. The Victoria pest destruction board paid sixpence per rat's tail and a shilling for a kerosene tin of beetles, which could be found in fig trees beside river banks.[94]

Graziers on the coastal strip formed the Thuringowa Marsupial Board in 1882, and the Ayr Marsupial Board in 1890, to kill kangaroos and wallabies. The boards levied livestock owners to finance their operations, under the Marsupials Destruction Act.[95] Farmers north of Townsville appear to have combined informally at first to combat the voracious greyback cane grub (*Lepidoderma albohirtum* Water.)[96] A former Johnstone River farmer, C.E. Jodrell, recalled in 1939 having 50 years earlier joined his neighbour, the manager of the Goondi plantation, in cutting scrub and undergrowth bordering creeks and swamps near their crops to eliminate harbour for the grubs in their beetle phase. Mr Jodrell and his neighbour cleared away all undergrowth within 50 chains (1km) of the cane, this distance being regarded as the limit of the beetles' flight.[97] During the 1890s, the Halifax Planters Club took part in grower and State Government-financed campaigns to collect and kill the beetles.[98] Growers' organisations in the Herbert River district took part in trials of paradichlor-

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boards were financed by levies on millers and growers and guided by the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations

[94] Vince Vitale (senior), interview

[95] Kerr, Black Snow, p.174.

[96] *QPP*, vol 2 of 2, 1930, 30th Annual report, Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, p.42, (p.942). Also known as the "greyback" cockchafer, the cane grub was indigenous to scrub or forest country cleared for sugar growing, and regarded as chief cane insect in northern parts of the State. Attempts at control up to 1930 included insecticides, applied to cane stools, collecting grubs by hand, encouraging root development of cane plants by conservation of moisture and manuring, and poisoning leaves of the beetles' feeding trees.

[97] *The Johnstone River Advocate,* 21 April, 1939. Mr Jodrell said he was advised to clear the scrub by a Miss Omerald, entomologist to the Royal Agricultural Society of Great Britain, who said similar grubs had destroyed orange trees on Cyprus. He lost no cane to grubs in the 20 years after the clearance in 1894.

[98] *V&P* 1897, Annual Report of Department of Agriculture, 1896-97, (p.914). The club reported a "marked decrease" in numbers of beetles.

benzine, organised by the C.S.R. Company in 1930.[99] The government formalised the growers' co-operative efforts by establishing pest destruction boards for each mill district, in 1935.[100] Farmers in the Basilisk district, near Innisfail felled and burnt scrub in the 1930s to reduce harbour for the beetles.[101]

The boards helped distribute young specimens of Giant American Toad (*Bufo marinus* l) through the Lower Herbert in 1938, believing advice from the Queensland Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations that these voracious amphibians would control cane grubs. Two years later the bureau reported that while the toads had reached "saturation point" in northern districts, they were killing relatively small numbers of grubs. The *Townsville Bulletin* reported in 1947 that cane toads were devastating apiaries and congregating under electric street lights in sugar towns. Cane toads spread through Queensland in following decades, in the absence of predators, mangling the food chain in the process. In 1984 the chairman of Cardwell Shire, Tip Byrne, told the *Courier-Mail* in Brisbane that cane toads were one of Australia's worst ecological problems, along with wild pigs and the Crown of Thorns Starfish. "The cane toad was the greatest mistake we ever made in this country," he said. "It is spreading throughout the nation at an alarming rate, and killing our native fauna. It ignores the cane beetle it was supposed to destroy, but kills everything else."[102]

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[99] *The Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 28 January, 1930.

[100] *QPP* 1939, vol 2 of 2, Department of Agriculture and Stock 1938-39. p.46 (p.1010), Report of Division of Entomology and Pathology. Cane Pest Boards comprised three growers' and two millers' representatives. They levied rates for soil fumigation, clearing and other experiments in beetle and rat control. By 1938 boards had been established for South Johnstone, Tully, Victoria, Invicta (Ingham line), Invictu (Giru), Pioneer, Kalamia and Inkerman mills. Some older voluntary pest boards were still in existence.

[101] *The Johnstone River Advocate,* 2 June, 1939.

[102] *North Queensland Register,* 24 December, 1938. The Macknade Pest Destruction Board reported that "toadlets" had been sent from Meringa Experiment Station to the Cordelia and Gairloch districts and more would be freed at Hawkins Creek and Ripple Creek. The Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations imported 120 Giant American Toads *(Bufo marinus l.)* from Puerto Rico, via a breeding program in Hawaii, in 1935, to control the greyback cane beetle (*Lepidoderma albohirtum*); Tim Low, *Feral Future,* Viking, Melbourne, 1999, p. 50; *T.D. Bulletin,* 5 March 1947; *Innisfail Evening Advocate,* 10 January, 1950; *Courier-Mail,* 3 February, 1984.

Farmers were required by law to control noxious weeds and to plant only approved varieties of cane.[103] Mill committees gave growers a say on industry policy, through district delegates to the Queensland Canegrowers' Council. Prices boards, comprising an independent chairman, a grower and a miller, decided conditions of delivery and sale of cane.[104] Mill committees negotiated in the 1960s with Ayr Shire Council and the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission to co-ordinate replenishment of the dwindling Burdekin Delta aquifer. They formed the North Burdekin Water Board in 1965 and South Burdekin Water Board, 1966, both with a majority of grower representatives.[105]

Burdekin farmers lobbied for 25 years for an agricultural college and land-use research station before the State government opened one at Clare in 1970. Petitioners in 1945 highlighted the need for research on efficient land use in low-rainfall tropical areas, from Bowen to Cardwell.[106] They recognised that all the "best" land was already under cane and argued that "lads and returned soldiers" needed training in temperate and tropical agriculture, irrigation techniques and animal husbandry to make best use of the millions of acres remaining.[107] One of the Home Hill pioneers told a reunion in 1951 he considered the wealth of the district could be best gauged by

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[103] *T.D. Bulletin,* 2 March, 1951. Careless selection of cheap, "disapproved" varieties could introduce major disease to a whole district, and offenders would be prosecuted, the chairman of the Inkerman Cane Pest and Disease Control Board, W.F.Klaka, warned in his annual report; *T.D.Bulletin*, 3 March, 1961 noted that the spread of giant sensitive weed had been checked by "sugar interests" in the Innisfail and Tully districts, but welcomed appointment of Lands Department officers to patrol for noxious plants.

[104] Bell, History of Sugar Industry", p.21.

[105] Kerr, Black Snow, pp.241-243, the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission found in 1964 that 100,000 megalitres needed to be replenished annually to prevent water shortages and saltwater intrusion. The pumping scheme was financed equally by growers and the three mills, Kalamia, Pioneer and Inkerman.

[106] *The Home Hill Observer*, 1 June, 1946; Kerr, Black Snow, p.270.

[107] *The Home Hill Observer*, 18 May, 1945.

the happiness of its residents. The town was healthy in this regard, with more than 20 nationalities living in harmony, he said.[108]

However, neighbours did not always co-operate. The Canegrowers' organisation advised Burdekin farmers in 1947 to work together to reduce losses by retaining grass cover on the river bank. "One section alone cannot solve the problem. Negligence on the part of a small number of farmers situated along vital portions of the river bank may menace many," the author of a report in the *Australian Sugar Yearbook* counselled.[109] Farmers belonged to competing political, cultural and religious organisations, evident in the activities of British Preference Leagues, the Australian Workers Union, the Foreign Cutters Defence Association and the Camorra Society of Italy, also known as the Black Hand.[110] Language barriers tended to reinforce divisions. Ayr farmer Domenico Domanti never joined any farming organisation because he could not write English. He regarded the British preference system, still operating in Ayr in the 1950s, a "dirty trick".[111]

Farmers scorned interference from bureaucrats, but also paradoxically expected their assistance and sympathy. For example, James Walker Cutten, a surveyor from Townsville, and formerly a pineapple and coffee grower at Clump Point, told the 1931 Royal Commission that his evidence was intended to "get people to take their feet off the necks of agriculturists". Other States were trying to destroy Queensland's sugar industry with imports grown by black labour. He also criticised the state government for banning the importation of calamus seeds, which he used to

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[108] *T.D.Bulletin,* 2 October, 1951, quoting W.F. Klaka.
[109] Kerr, Black Snow, pp.211-212, *T.D. Bulletin*, 16 December, 1946, p3; *Australian Sugar Year Book 1946-1947*, W.J.S. Sloan, "The 1946 Burdekin Flood", p.107.
[110] Jones, Hurricane Lamps pp.354-359; Kerr, Black Snow, pp.190-191. Each organisation attempted to gain exclusive rights for members. British Preference Leagues, formed in Innisfail and Ayr in1930, supported British preference for workers in every field, commercial, industrial and professional and upheld the White Australia policy.
[111] Domenico Domanti, interview, Ayr, 11 February, 2000, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.

grow at Clump Point, questioning fears that calamus would grow like weeds on the northern rivers.[112] In 1937, a correspondent to the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* complained of having been thwarted over 50 years by land settlement officials with petty rules which he asserted favoured foreigners. He had struggled on farms at Tully and Home Hill and missed securing one at Proserpine because of government inaction. Queensland seemed to suffer more than most States from the lack of encouragement and assistance:

> The average Aussie bush settler is second to none for energy, self-reliance and grit, but being a product of Australian conditions his efforts, under unique difficulties and handicaps are often contemptuously discounted by arm chair critics and the bureaucratic institutions functioning from the capital cities. [113]

Marshal Jayasuria, a retired farmer from Bambaroo, near Ingham, asserted in an interview in 2001 that he could not recall ever receiving any government help while working with his father from the early 1930s. "They'll give you advice, even to this day, but you're paying for that too," he said.[114] The Instructor in Tropical Agriculture, Howard Newport, complained in 1906 that his work was heavily handicapped by the settlers' "apathetic opposition" to innovation, which he attributed to "a spirit of conservatism bred of the limitations of the pioneer". He hoped new settlers would venture beyond staple crops such as sugar cane and maize to experiment with other crops favoured by North Queensland's soil and climate – for example coffee, cotton, tobacco, rubber and fibres such as sisal hemp.[115]

However, landholders made good use of government botanists for the identification of plant specimens, from the nineteenth century onwards. Long-serving

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[112] *T.D. Bulletin,* 25 July, 1931.
[113] *Ibid.,* 29 July, 1937, p.12, "Pioneers of the Land". This letter reflects the extent of farmers' dependence on government protection.
[114] Marshall Jayasuria, interview, Sunnybank, Brisbane, 1 December, 2001, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU.
[115] *QPP*, 1906, vol 2 of 2, Department of Agriculture annual report, p. 55 [p. 179].

botanist Frederick Manson Bailey built his six-volume compendium of native plants, *Queensland Flora,* from the samples they sent him to assess for noxious or beneficial qualities.[116]

Conclusions

The process of "husbanding the land" identified by Bolton as crucial to successful white settlement of North Queensland began with would-be farmers such as Abergowrie's soldier settlers standing in the windrowed debris of razed rainforests. For cane and dairy farmers, even nature lovers like Bill and Laura Scott, destruction of existing vegetation was inevitable. However, by the 1950s and 60s land being opened for clearing and development, such as the Malaan closer-settlement district on the Atherton Tableland and the coastal fringe of the Herbert Valley, was increasingly marginal. Over-ambitious government planners, not farmers, were primarily to blame for subsequent problems with erosion, soil depletion and waterlogging in these two areas.

Sugar growers were constrained during the period of my study, by production controls through the assignment system, mandatory fallowing and, I believe, a generally conservative ethos, reflected in the *North Queensland Register*, and also in settlers' stories. Their ancestry does not appear to have affected their stewardship of the land, although there is scope for further study in this area, perhaps focussing on just one mill. The ideals of closer-settlement were still promoted in the 1960s by groups such as the North Queensland Local Government Association's People The

[116] Frederick Manson Bailey (1827-1915) established a nursery in Brisbane in 1861 an became Queensland's first Colonial Botanist in 1881. *Queensland Flora* was published between 1889 and 1902. He was succeeded by his son John Frederick Bailey, a former curator of Brisbane Botanic gardens. From D. A. Herbert, "Cyril Tenison White", *The Queensland Naturalist,* January 1951, pp. 43-47.

North Committee.[117] Farmers still had faith in sugar cane. Seven-hundred growers from around Innisfail and Tully applied for increased assignments when the government approved a 500-farm expansion in districts north of Townsville, inspired by the short-lived spike in prices caused by the Cuban missile crisis.[118]

My examples of stewardship suggest that individuals cleared, settled and farmed the North in search of financial security and also because of the intangible benefits of country living advocated by closer-settlement idealists. Both motivations gave settlers incentives to care for their land. My inferences are based on mostly indirect statements, with the exception of Edmund Banfield's reflections. I have not studied farm records or attempted a historical/ archeological study of soil, vegetation and man-made structures, each of which could yield more material for inferences on stewardship.

[117] People the North Committee, 1962, JCU Library Archives, JCU PTNC/PUB/PR. *The T.D. Bulletin* expressed caution in 1964 about past experiences with closer-settlement schemes such as Clare in the Burdekin and Berburrum in southern Queensland, developed by governments and thrown open to settlers on government valuation. "It will be remembered with much regret that work by departments in this state have resulted in lands being over-capitalised." *T.D.Bulletin,* 18 February, 1964.
[118] *Innisfail Evening Advocate,* 8 April, 1964.

Advertisement for Orpheus Island from The Australian Sugar Year Book, 1957

Chapter 5

Guardians of nature

Edmund Banfield, Hugo Flecker, John Busst and Len Webb considered themselves co-workers with nature, not mere spectators. Each originally a stranger to the region, they extended public perceptions of the North beyond tourist and sugar industry promotions to include awareness of its natural history and ecology. Their activism, as self-appointed custodians of nature, was puzzlingly altruistic. It ranged from Banfield's guardianship of birds on Dunk Island to Busst's defence of the Great Barrier Reef. While there were other conservation activists – for example Keith Kennedy, president of the Townsville and District Natural History Society in the 1950s and 60s – the four discussed in this chapter were significant for having raised awareness of the interdependency of humans and nature through their writings and political lobbying. Banfield (1852-1921), a writer and hobby farmer, and Flecker (1884-1957), a radiotherapist and founder of the North Queensland Naturalists' Club, dissected and illuminated the North's postcard scenery. Banfield publicised his concerns about possible links between clearing and climate change in 1889, while working as a journalist in Townsville. Later he introduced the natural history of the tropical coast to readers around the world and became a guardian of birdlife on Dunk Island. Flecker described, defended and promoted North Queensland's flora and fauna. Busst (1909-1971), an artist, and Webb (1920-), a rainforest ecologist, both eschewed what Webb described in 1961 as "rather pious articles deploring the spoliation of the Australian countryside"[1] and instead campaigned locally, nationally and internationally for laws to limit exploitation of the reef and rainforest, using

[1] L. Webb and G. Tracey to J. and A. Busst, 4 April, 1961 (JBC/corr/14)

ecological, aesthetic and utilitarian arguments. Webb wrote to Busst in 1966 that he aimed to promote a broad rationale for "conserving the beauty of entire developed and developing landscapes" on ecological and aesthetic grounds, and not settle merely for conservation of fragments in habitat reserves and national parks.[2]

Their colleague in the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Judith Wright, observed in 1968 that "conservation" had become a contentious word, representing an emerging concept "actively resisted at all levels"[3]. Francis Ratcliffe, secretary of the Australian Conservation Foundation, wrote the same year that patriotism and development were assumed to be synonymous in Australia and that "conservationism" was therefore "not part of nationhood".[4] Nevertheless, the foundation acknowledged a "widely awakening interest in conservation among Australians", which it hoped to encourage further. The foundation began a public education program in 1967 to promote practical aspects of conservation and what the present generation could do to leave "a land that is soundly productive and attractive as it could and should be".[5] The concept of conservation had some popular support in North Queensland too. A newly appointed honorary fauna protector, E.C. Morris, of Tokalong Siding, Ingham, wrote to *The Herbert River Express* in 1950 conceding that while the pioneers of the 1930s might have been justified in killing game birds for food, enlightened people now regarded the care and welfare of native fauna as being as important as the conservation and propagation of native flora. He feared for the future of the Great Grey Kangaroo, through destruction of its natural habitats.[6]

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[2] L. Webb to J. Busst, 28 July, 1966, JBC/Corr/14
[3] Judith Wright, "Conservation as a Concept", *Quadrant,* January-February, 1968, No. 51, vol 12, No. 1.
[4] Francis N. Ratcliffe, "Conservation and Australia", Australian Conservation Foundation, Canberra, 1968, reprinted from *Australian Quarterly,* March, 1968.
[5] "The A.C.F. Viewpoint Series", from Papers Presented at a Symposium "Caring for Queensland", organised by the Australian Conservation Foundation, University of Queensland, 1967, p.26.
[6] *Herbert River Express*, 2 February, 1950; 18 February, 1950

Underwater photographer Noel Monkman, of Cairns, described himself as a "caretaker" in his advocacy of protection of the Great Barrier Reef in the early 1960s.[7] In 1965, the *Evening Advocate* newspaper in Innisfail publicised Webb's view that aesthetic and spiritual reasons for conservation were self-evident, "increasingly so today as urban progress and pollution reach further and further into the community."[8] In 1967, The *Townsville Daily Bulletin* condemned over-clearing of forests, careless burning, injudicious cultivation and over-stocking, in an editorial welcoming the proposed formation of a northern National Trust branch.[9] The paper hoped the branch would help balance "the monuments of our forefathers" and "the monuments of nature". Implicit in this argument was the idea that citizens might protect "natural monuments" if they had a sense of ownership and custodianship. Wright wrote in 1976 that the aim of the Save The Reef Committee had been "to convince Australia that the Reef belonged to them". The Commonwealth Government's opposition to oil drilling on the reef was based on a belief that the reef was a "natural phenomenon" of which Australians and people throughout the world should be proud.[10]

The following chapter asks why and how Banfield, Flecker, Busst and Webb aspired to and exercised their stewardship of nature, and also examines the development of conservation groups in the North. I have found no evidence that

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[7] Patricia Clare, *The Struggle for the Great Barrier Reef,* London, 1971, pp.62-72, cited by Hutton and Connors, Environment Movement, p.99.

[8] Press statement by Larry Foley, news officer, People For the North Committee, PTNC/Pub/1-22; PTNC/Sub 1-12/PR, published in *Evening Advocate, Innisfail,* 15 November, 1965, "Hopes for Mankind in Scientific Mission to North's Rain Forests", by Larry Foley, quoting Len Webb. Web's name has been edited out of the newspaper report, but appears in the original press statement.

[9] *T.D. Bulletin,* 14 October, 1967, editorial, "Spoilers or Preservers", supported formation of a northern branch of the National Trust, noting "man is a notorious spoiler of his environment" and hoping the trust would preserve the "natural and physical heritage of the northern people".

[10] Wright, Coral Reef Battleground, p.147, quoting Federal Minister for National Development, Mr Schwartz, in *The Australian,* 13 March, 1970.

farmers were antagonised by the conservation measures advocated by Banfield and Flecker, both residents of the North. Banfield refrained from commenting on the sugar industry and Flecker appears to have made general rather than pointed appeals for respect for bush flora, control of soil erosion and control of noxious weeds.[11] By the 1960s visitors such as Len Webb and Judith Wright began to speak out against wasteful farming practices. But Webb emphasised that conservation was everyone's responsibility. "No use in blaming the landholders of today for mistakes of the past – that is unless they are determined to repeat them," he wrote in 1966.[12] Wright took a perhaps more confrontational stance, pitting the "small voices" of ill-financed conservationists and ecologists against those responsible for lowering water tables, stripping uplands of protective plants and forest cover and extending agriculture into dangerously marginal areas.[13]

I have found little direct evidence of how farmers reacted in the 1960s to criticisms by outsiders such as Webb and Wright, or to the State Government's small efforts at imposing land-use controls, through River Improvement Trust laws and extensions of National Parks. The Leader of the Opposition, John Duggan, warned in debate on the River Improvement Trust Acts Amendment Bill, in 1965, against antagonising landholders with a contemptuous "big brother" attitude, when ordering soil erosion-control works. He sought a final right of appeal to the Minister for landholders facing such orders.[14] Billie Gill, wife of a farmer and daughter of a farmer, has written that she and other members of the Innisfail branch of the Wildlife

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[11] H. Flecker, "North Queensland – A Naturalists' Paradise", *The North Queensland Naturalist*, February, 1937, p.20; John H. Pearn, "Flecker, Hugo", *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* vol. 14: 1940-1980, Melbourne, 1996, p.183.
[12] Leonard Webb, "The Rape of the Forests", in A.J. Marshall (ed) *The Great Extermination,* London, 1966, p.202.
[13] Judith Wright, "Conservation as a Concept", *Quadrant,* Vo. 51, vol. 12, Jan-Feb 1968, pp.29-30.
[14] *QPD* 1965, vol. 241, 21 September, pp.828-829.

Preservation Society of Queensland were regarded by farmers – especially cane farmers – as a "mob of nit wits".[15] The branch's objectives in 1967 included tighter gun controls, banning the weed and tree killer Tordon, tax rebates for landholders who spared natural vegetation along watercourses and an investigation of pollution from the Mourilyan, South Johnstone and Goondi mills.[16]

Edmund Banfield

Edmund Banfield, journalist, amateur botanist, honorary wildlife ranger and member of the Field Naturalists' Society of Victoria and the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union, imagined himself as both part of nature and a viewer in his sanctuary on Dunk Island. "Is man the only part of teeming nature capable of disinterested joy in all the other parts?" he asked in 1908.[17] Banfield appears to have found drawing near to nature easier on the island than in the dry and forbidding district of Townsville, where he arrived from Sydney, in 1882. Writing 25 years later he remembered Castle Hill as having been barren and treeless, lacking the luxuriant vegetation with which it was rumoured to have once been clothed. He regarded the hill's denudation as a "perpetual and dreary monument to the absorption of the citizens in business".[18] He carried the lodestone of a green and pleasant England he left behind in 1854, aged two, and was not disappointed when he returned in 1884, looking for a "Merrie England … unsoiled and unadulterated by contact with the turbid overflowings of the cities". The landscape of his home county, Kent, possessed

[15] Billie Gill, e-mail to Ian Frazer, 21 November, 2003.
[16] Wildlife Protection Society of Queensland, Innisfail branch, annual report, 1967.
[17] E.J. Banfield, *The Confessions of a Beachcomber,* Sydney, 1968 edition (first published London 1908, p. 219.
[18] Michel Noonan, *A Different Drummer* , St Lucia, 1983, p.37; E.J. Banfield, *Within The Barrier: Tourists' Guide to the North Queensland Coast (cover title The Winter Paradise of Australia)*, Townsville, 1907, pp.17-19.

a “softness and harmony”, compared with the “monotonous glare” of Australia, he wrote in the *Townsville Bulletin*.[19]

He and his wife, Bertha, bought a house near the foot of Castle Hill in 1886, with views of Cleveland Bay, Magnetic Island and the more distant Palm Island group.[20] During 1887, the *Bulletin* and its weekly sister publication, *The Townsville Herald*, condemned removal of trees from the hill.[21] The *Herald* published reports from various sources on forest conservation in 1888.[22] These articles reflected concerns held by Banfield, who put the case for replanting the hill in 1889, speaking as a private citizen during a meeting to prepare for a sitting of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry, he stated:

> This bold hill once, when adorned with timber was the pride and beauty of the place, but the unpardonable foolishness of the people has permitted it to become a scar and a disfigurement. What … is required is that trees should be planted at once, and wherever possible, if the trees be judiciously selected, the timber produced would in time to come repay the original cost of the planting.[23]

Heavy rain would surely erode the hill’s precipitous slopes to a mass of bare stone, radiating “intolerable sweltering heat”. His arguments, echoing George Perkins Marsh’s theories in *Man and Nature*, published in 1864, assumed that trees conserved moisture and regulated evaporation, that there were laws of nature that should not be broken, and that nature was a benevolent, self-regulating agency. He asserted that vegetation had an “absorptive power”, which was among the “wisest and best of

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[19] Noonan, Different Drummer, p.53
[20] *Ibid.,,* pp.70-71
[21] Paul Stevens, “Vegetation Conservation in Queensland, 1870-1900”, in B.J. Dalton (ed), *Peripheral Visions*, Townsville, 1991, p.186, citing *T. D. Bulletin*, 10 November, 1887.
[22] *Ibid.,,* p.187.
[23] *The Townsville Herald*, 2 February, 1889. The meeting was convened by Townsville Chamber of Commerce.

nature's provisions".[24] The establishment of a new botanical gardens would help the public to appreciate trees and ultimately relieve the town of its "uncompromising and forbidding barrenness, while creating a community of shade and greenness". Of course, this would not count for much worth for "those who are forever fiercest in the fierce race for wealth".[25]

Banfield encouraged botanist, postmaster and nurseryman Thomas Gulliver in his establishment of gardens at Roseneath, Aitkenvale and Hyde Park, and supported his introduction of many species of what the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* described as beautiful trees from abroad. Gulliver (1847-1931) had come to Australia as a botanist employed by the Victorian Government Botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller and had spent some years collecting data on Eucaplytus trees in Tasmania before moving to Queensland. He appears to have shared Banfield's interest in nature conservation, having attempted to form a Field Naturalists'Club in Townsville in 1896, for "fortnightly excursions and occasional evening meetings".[26]

The Banfields moved 110 miles north from Townsville to Dunk Island in September 1897, initially for a six-month trial. Banfield wrote little about the rationale for this retreat. His wife explained 27 years later that he had been worn out from his night and day work as a journalist. A colleague, Thomas Adlam, wrote that Banfield had been disillusioned with daily journalism, and had "shook the dust from

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[24] *Ibid.,* Marsh wrote in *Man And Nature,* Cambridge Massachusetts, 1965 edition, p.48: "it is impossible to doubt that many of the operations of the pioneer settler tend to produce great modifications in atmospheric humidity, temperature and electricity", and (pp. 186-188) that nature would take revenge for the "violation of her harmonies" through deterioration of soil and climate.

[25] *The Townsville Herald,* 2 February, 1889. Banfield argued that the existing botanical gardens in North Ward had been a comparative failure and should be relocated to the camping reserve at Cluden.

[26] *T.D. Bulletin,* T.A. Gulliver obituary,15 June, 1931; *North Queensland Herald,* 13 May, 1896.

the streets of Townsville from his shoes".[27] Banfield later depicted himself as "a weak mortal who had sought an unprofaned sanctuary", and that he had chosen the island out of "a sentimental regard for the welfare of bird and plant life" and his desire to forbid interference with birds on the island, "save those of murderous and cannibalistic instincts".[28]

His activism consisted of seeking government protection for native birds on Dunk Island and islands in the surrounding Family Group. He practised an unofficial custodianship of this birdlife until his appointment as honorary ranger in 1905, followed by the government's proclamation of the islands as a sanctuary in which shooting of birds was totally prohibited.[29] Later he sought protection of dugongs, fearing they were being threatened with extinction by Japanese fishermen.[30] He dreamed of the creation of a national park, including Hinchinbrook Island, not a park "trimmed according to the principles of horticultural art", but simply a wilderness for future generations to see the North as it had had been in 1770 and centuries before, with one exception. The exception was the coast's "original population".[31] While Banfield was a staunch defender of native birds, he wrote in 1908 that that he did not support too much meddling with Aborigines by well-meaning legislators, despite their fate as a fast-vanishing race.[32] "The present is the age of official protection, with perhaps a trifle too much interference and meddlesomeness," he wrote.[33] A seemingly open-minded, curious observer of his Aboriginal workers, he admired their bushcraft, but noted the disappearance of some skills, such as stone axe-making, as they learnt

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[27] Noonan, p.94, quoting Bertha Banfield to Alec Chisholm, 3 April, 1924, Alec Chisholm Papers; R.P. Adlam, "A Old Friend's Tribute".
[28] Banfield, Confessions, pp.xv, 55.
[29] Noonan, Different Drummer, p.116, pp.134-135.
[30] *Ibid.,,* p. 209.
[31] Edmund Banfield, *Dunk Island, Its General Characteristics,* 1908, p. 64.
[32] Banfield, Confessions*,* p.159. In a section titled "Stone Age Folks", and a chapter titled "Passing Away".
[33] *Ibid.,,* p.91.

new tasks and occupations from the "wonder-working whites".[34] He furthered his interest in botany by collecting specimens which he is said to have sent to naturalists in other parts of Australia and overseas.[35]

Banfield's writings about the beauty and brutality of life on the island a few miles to sea from Bedarra Island introduced a new vision of Australia to British readers and future asylum-seekers such as John Busst. In *The Confessions of a Beachcomber,* published in London in 1908 and Australia in 1933, he advocated living with instead of striving against Nature. He followed American nature writers such as Henry David Thoreau, in presenting nature as a counter-balance to bustling materialism.[36] He described "the unspoiled jungle" as preferable to prim parks, clipped gardens and occupations of society, and the condition of possessing an "amplitude of time and space" better than "the one crowded hour".[37] It was still possible to "draw near to nature" in the North, and attain "the happy condition of the simple, uncomplicated man".[38]

Hugo Flecker

Dr Hugo Flecker, a founder of the North Queensland Naturalists' Club, worked throughout his 25 years in Cairns to remedy what he saw as widespread indifference to the flora and fauna of the "northern paradise" he discovered when he arrived from Adelaide in 1932. Dr Flecker, a radiotherapist, toxicologist, amateur botanist and active member of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, contributed 1036 "Current Nature Topics" columns to the *Cairns Post* between 1935 and his

[34] *Ibid.,,* p.187.
[35] *T.D. Bulletin,* 7 June, 1923.
[36] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Yale, 1967, pp.84-88.
[37] Banfield, Confessions, p.219
[38] *Ibid.,* Foreword, p.xvi

death in 1957, aged 73.[39] He also edited the naturalists' club's monthly magazine, *The North Queensland Naturalist* and established, with help of fellow members, the North Queensland Herbarium. The club grew from a public meeting called by the Mayor of Cairns in 1932 to, in Flecker's words, attract the attention of visitors "to the natural glories of North Queensland". He devoted himself to trying to add a new layer of meaning to the district's popular scenery, believing most residents of the North in the 1930s were indifferent to the bush and its treasures:

> …these are quite content to remove every vestige of natural vegetation to make way for a garden, perhaps of crotons and acalyphas, precisely similar to that of almost every other householder and public body. The wonderful treasures then to most people are not at all appreciated.[40]

In his opinion, the district's newspapers were full of nonsense about nature, and its residents incapable of naming even the most common objects correctly.[41] He complained to his friend the novelist Jean Devanny in 1952 that she never remembered technical names, "mainly because you are not interested, and nobody remembers what they are not interested in."[42] He conceded in 1937 that the club had helped tourism in the Far North and had begun to modify erroneous conceptions and correct mistaken identities. However, he criticised the council and tourist authorities for what he saw as continuing apathy:

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[39] John J. Pearn, "Flecker, Hugo", *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* vol.14: 1940-1980, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 182-184; Carole Ferrier, *Jean Devanny, Romantic Revolutionary*, Melbourne, 1999, pp.204-205, citing J.R. Clarkson, *Dr Hugo Flecker,* Bulletin 384, Historical Society, Cairns.
[40] Dr H Flecker, `North Queensland – A Naturalists' Paradise', *The Queensland Naturalist*, February, 1937, p.20.
[41] *Ibid,,* p. 21. For example, the misnaming of native trees as "oaks", "maple" and "walnut".
[42] Jean Devanny, *Bird of Paradise,* Sydney, 1945, p84; letter to Jean Devanny, 12 April, 1952, JCU library special collection [JD/corr(p)47].

> Note the rarity of native vegetation in the public gardens and streets and the general desire of local authorities to introduce trees already exceedingly well known in other parts.[43]

Flecker advocated street plantings of native trees and shrubs, in line with the nationalistic fashion in southern States,[44] but failed to convince Innisfail Chamber of Commerce in 1939 to plant native palms along entrances to the town. The chamber asked for his advice, then decided to recommend plantings of coconut palms, which had been proven in Cairns and Townsville, despite his view that these trees were not natives and not as beautiful as indigenous species.[45]

The naturalists' club took over the North Queensland Herbarium in Cairns and staged annual wild nature shows, displaying "brilliantly coloured butterflies and many other insects, orchids, palms and other plants, aboriginal handcraft and numerous other material".[46] Members sought action from local and State authorities to prevent the destruction of native flora through bushfires around Cairns. They were also concerned about the environmental threat of exotic animals such cane toads and mosquito fish, the impact of tourists on Green Island and Michelmas Cay, soil erosion and the spread of introduced weeds.[47] Flecker, a medical officer in Egypt and the Western Front during World War I, had wide interests, including toxicology. He is probably best remembered for having identified the box jellyfish, *Chironex Fleckeri* as the cause of mysterious deaths of swimmers in North Queensland. A keen explorer of the Cairns hinterland, he appears to have been driven by the good fortune of living in what he regarded as a wonderful locality for natural history, and by his irritation at

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[43] Flecker, Queensland Naturalist, February, 1937, pp.20-21
[44] *Ibid.,* p.21; Katie Holmes, `Gardens', in *Journal of Australian Studies*, No 61, 1999, p.61, says William Guilfoyle, director of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, advocated growing native plants in a book published in 1911 and that "by the 1930s horticulturists were consistently encouraging Australian gardeners to grow more native plants".
[45] *The Johnstone River Advocate*, 12 May, 19 May, 9 June 1939.
[46] *Ibid.,* p23.
[47] Devanny, p205, citing Clarkson.

public indifference to native plants and animals. He resisted the commodification of Nature, "the desire to remove the natural and substitute the artificial", and what he saw as public contempt for bush flora.[48]

His activism reflected his sense of responsibility for Nature. He campaigned between 1949 and 1953 against plans by Cairns City Council to cut down a large and famous fig tree (*Ficus infectoia*) in Abbott Street, Cairns, considered a nuisance by a nearby store owner. Flecker turned the venerable and commodious tree into a symbol of nature - one of the "best ornamental treasures" in the town, and one which should have been close to immortal, since it was capable of constantly renewing itself through parasitic roots. "It seems to be a fact that there can be no natural death of the fig tree", he wrote in 1949. Not only was the tree at risk, he added, but so also were large numbers of Northern Pencil Orchids attached to its trunk and the many birds that roosted in its branches.[49] The council spared the tree for a couple of years, saying it could not afford the 400 pounds removal bill. Flecker, who had applied to UNESCO in 1951 to have the tree listed as a national archaeological treasure,[50] led a deputation to the council in 1953, stressing the tree's value as a tourist attraction. The mayor, Ald W Fulton replied that the old fig's beauty had already been marred by lopping and that the council was providing for the future by planting 189 trees along the town's esplanade. The council was unmoved by the tree's antiquity, finding that while estimates ranged from 700 years to 200 years, not even Forestry Department experts could say how old it really was. Flecker's last reported comment was that the tree

[48] *The Queensland Naturalist,* February, 1937, p.20; Pearn, Flecker, pp.182-183; Conversation, Pat Flecker, Townsville, to Ian Frazer, 2 June, 2003.
[49] *The North Queensland Naturalist*, 1 September, 1949, pp. 1-3.
[50] Flecker to Jean Devanny, 20 September, 1951, JCU Library Archives, JD/corr(p) 41.

would never be forgotten by anyone who had seen it: "they might forget the existence of Cairns – they might forget where it is – but they will never forget the tree".[51]

John Busst and Len Webb

John and Alison Busst began lobbying the Queensland Government in 1957 to protect Clump Point Mountain, a 268m, rainforest-covered basalt peak behind their home at Bingil Bay, north-east of Tully. Alison Busst later recalled that they had decided to fight for the mountain the night they moved to Bingil Bay from nearby Bedarra Island, in August 1957. Their friends, CSIRO ecologists Len Webb and Geoff Tracey, coincidentally called the same night and offered support. The Bussts appear to have based their case on the rarity and beauty of the 7000ac (2800ha) remnant of lowland rainforest. Developers had already cleared large tracts of rainforest in the Mission Beach district. The government responded to their lobbying and declared the mountain a national park several years later. The land had previously been part of a Commonwealth defence reserve, and was apparently unwanted by the Johnstone Shire Council.[52] Webb, who had begun studying the rainforests of North Queensland in 1944, said in an interview in 2003 that there had been ecological reasons for conserving the rare patch of coastal jungle, but doubted if John Busst had been aware of these in 1957.[53]

The Bussts moved to Bingil Bay to escape an invasion of tourists and pleasure boats and for the convenience of living on the mainland. Ferrying visitors to and from

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[51] *The Cairns Post*, 28 July, 1953 and29 July, 1953.
[52] Ali Busst to Professor Brian Dalton, James Cook University, 3 September, 1979, JCU Library Archives, JBC/Corr/14; L. Webb to I. Frazer, telephone conversation, Townsville, 29 June, 2003; Perry Harvey, of Mission Beach, to I. Frazer, telephone conversation, Townsville, 29 June, 2003.
[53] L. Webb to I. Frazer, 29 June, 2003: "it was one of the virgin rainforest hills that remained in that area. They wanted to keep it virgin. I don't think John was aware of its ecological importance."

the mainland involved a 10 mile (16km) round trip in sometimes rough conditions. John Busst and a group including his school friend, the Federal Treasurer, Harold Holt, once had to swim 300m back to the island after the near-capsize of their small boat in high seas.[54] Holt and his wife, Zara, holidayed occasionally at Bedarra Island and bought land for a holiday home at Bingil Bay in 1960. Busst, who had been a contemporary of Holt's at Wesley College in Melbourne, and Melbourne University, made use of his contacts in high places during the Save the Reef campaign.

At Bingil Bay, Busst became a conservationist in the then reasonably new political sense of the word. His membership of the Fauna and Flora Protectors Association and a contribution, in 1956, to the North Queensland Naturalists' Club's magazine indicate he had an interest in nature on Bedarra.[55] However, at Bingil Bay he extended his private stewardship to public advocacy for the rainforests. Not only did he treat nature reverently, but he tried to persuade others to follow him, for the well-being of the North. While his campaign to have Mount Clump Point reserved might have had an element of self-interest, because of the rainforest's proximity to his backyard,[56] his next cause was further from home, a tract of lowland rainforest near Innisfail which he believed was at risk from an army exercise. Busst became the self-styled "Bingil Bay Bastard" as he badgered contacts in Canberra in 1966 to get the army to desist from using this "extremely rare and scientifically invaluable" tropical lowland rainforest for defoliation experiments.[57]

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[54] Zara Holt, *My Life and Harry,* Sun Books*,* Melbourne, 1968, p.102. The Holts bought land at Bingil Bay a couple of years later, *Evening Advocate,* Innisfail, 11 March, 1960.
[55] J. Busst, "Nesting Grey Swiftlet of Bedara Island", *The North Queensland Naturalist,* Cairns, No. 116, 1 September, 1956; J. Busst to Innisfail Shire president, E.H.Webb, 9 November, 1965, JBC/Corr/1, on membership of the Fauna and Flora Protectors Association; Z. Holt, p.92.
[56] Ali Busst to Professor Brian Dalton, JCU, 3 September, 1979, JBC/Corr/14.
[57] *Nation,* 1 May, 1971, Busst's obituary was headed "The Bingil Bay Bastard". Journalist Barry Wain wrote that Busst had given himself the title for "constantly badgering Canberra over army plans to take over a tract of rainforest where he discovered it was proposed to conduct defoliation experiments".

Webb first met Busst in the late 1940s, when Busst sent him a specimen of a poisonous but reputedly medicinal shrub for analysis.[58] At the time Webb was working in the Innisfail district on the Australian Phytochemical Survey, a search for plants with chemicals suitable for medical drugs or insecticides, prompted by war-time shortages. Webb, then 24, had worked before the war for the Queensland Government Botanist, C.T. White, and had learnt to detect plant alkaloids by taste. He travelled from Tully to Cape York between 1944 and 1952, employed by the Commonwealth Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and tested and collected specimens with guidance from Aborigines, timber-cutters and haulers. Geoff Tracey became his assistant in 1950.[59]

Busst had moved from Melbourne to Bedarra Island in 1940, aged about 30, after helping Justus Jorgensen to build the mudbrick and stone studio and home at Eltham which became the Montsalvat artists' colony.[60] Born in Bendigo on 26 April, 1909, he had attended Wesley College, Melbourne, from 1920 to 1927. He matriculated to Melbourne University the same year as his classmate Harold Holt, who studied law and entered politics in 1935. Busst's school record shows he obtained honours in French and a scholarship to Queen's College at Melbourne University.[61] He studied for a Bachelor of Arts, then learnt painting from Jorgensen and followed two other Montsalvat artists, Noel Wood and Mike Hall, to Bedarra Island in the Family Group a few kilometres from Edmund Banfield's former home

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[58] L. Webb, letter to I. Frazer, 6 November, 2002. The specimen was from *Ochrosia elliptica,* a tropical shrub containing alkaloids.

[59] "The Australian Phytochemical Survey: Historical Aspects of the CSIRO Search for New Drugs in Australian Plants", *Historical Records of Australian Science,* vol 9, No 4, Canberra, 1993, pp.336-337; L. Webb, interview with I. Frazer, Brisbane, 1 December, 2001, copy of tape in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU; L.J. Webb, "Australian Plants and Chemical Research", in L.J.Webb, D.Whitlock, J. Le Gay Brereton, *The Last of Lands,* Milton, 1969, p.84 recorded that more than 4000 species of higher plants in Australia were screened for alkaloids during the survey. Several new alkaloids had been shown to have therapeutic promise in treatment of human diseases.

[60] Hutton and Connors, Environment Movement, p.100.

[61] From John Horatio Busst's record card, register number 5468, Wesley College Archives.

on Dunk Island.[62] Webb saw the three artists as escapees from the city, "in the spirit of other well-known artists throughout history". Busst's father had given him a kind of remittance, "adequate for a rather bohemian life", and to pursue his interests in literature and the arts.

Webb sometimes called at the island on his northern field trips after beginning postgraduate studies in rainforest ecology at the University of Queensland in 1952, and Busst visited him in Brisbane on trips south. He wrote later that they listened to recordings of Wagner on a wind-up gramophone, recited Tennyson and explored the metaphysical world in "a euphoric state induced by ethyl alcohol":

> I can attest to John's avidity for scientific-romantic ideas (which I found myself always promoting), along with others such as timber-millers and cutters, foresters and poets, even engineers and ordinary citizens, all under the spell of wishing to share the mystery and sacred beauty of the rainforests.[63]

During his fieldwork, Webb had experienced what he later described as a "cathexis" or sense of bonding with the rainforest. He said he had been overwhelmed, without feeling claustrophobic or afraid, by this "complex terrestrial ecosystem". Something "radically empirical", akin to concepts such as "soul", "heart" and "spirit" had rubbed off on him then. His conversations with Busst and Judith Wright had helped to clarify this feeling.[64] He guessed that some farmers and graziers he had met as a child in central-western Queensland and later during his fieldwork in the North had a similar attachment, bonding or cathexis with the land, and likewise some timber-cutters and tin-scratchers.[65]

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[62] The arrival of Noel Wood, "a young South Australian artist", was reported by the *Johnstone River Advocate,* 6 November, 1936.
[63] L.Webb to I.Frazer, 7 November, 2002.
[64] L. Webb, interviewed by I. Frazer, Brisbane, 1 December, 2001, copy in North Queensland Oral History Collection, JCU; L. Webb to I. Frazer, 6 November, 2002.
[65] L. Webb to I. Frazer, 27 July, 2001. The son of itinerant workers from western Queensland, Webb started work in Rockhampton in 1936 as a clerk-typist with the Department of

Webb said his activism had grown from this experience. In the 1960s, his sense of the sublime in nature, demanding to be defended, led him to "wake up one morning an adversary of the powers that be".[66] He argued in 1973 that humans, being the only animals conscious of a relationship with the rest of the world, and understanding natural processes and the continuity of life, could not escape some responsibility towards the rest of nature and for future generations.[67]

Webb worked for the CSIRO in the rainforests of North Queensland and New Guinea through the 1950s and 60s. He analysed 2500 Australian plant species and 2250 species from Papua and New Guinea during the Australian Phytochemical Survey. The search, regarded by the CSIRO as "an investigation of Australian flora as a natural resource", yielded several hundred new alkaloids to be screened for pharmacological uses. In 1963, at the invitation of Judith Wright, he joined the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland as vice-president. Wright had helped to form the society in Brisbane in 1962, as a forum for conservation, to promote the value of wildlife.[68] She regarded him as being "imbued with the tragedy of the forests" and prepared to make himself unpopular in their defence.[69]

Webb began promoting conservation through popular journals from 1960,[70] including writing an analysis of the "ecological catastrophe" of white settlement, published in 1966 in *The Great Extermination,* edited by A.J. Marshall. He wrote the introduction to *The Last of Lands,* in 1969, with its ultimatum: "not another acre to be

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Agriculture and Stock , then was transferred to the Queensland Herbarium, in Brisbane, where he trained as an agricultural chemist (interview, 1 December, 2002).

[66] L. Webb, telephone conversation with I. Frazer, 29 June, 2003, on "confronting the powers that be".

[67] L. J. Webb, *Environmental Boomerang,* Milton, Queensland, 1973, p.96.

[68] "The Australian Phytochemical Survey", *Historical Records of Australian Science,* vol 9, No. 4, 1993, p.355; L. Webb to I. Frazer, 6 November, 2002; Wright, p. 2.

[69] Wright, pp.3-4.

[70] L.J. Webb, "Conservation for Man, Conservation of Man", Queensland Peace Committee – *Discussion Bulletin* No. 1, 1960.

alienated, not another native habitat to be gutted, until we take stock".[71] In *Environmental Boomerang,* 1973, he discussed scientific, aesthetics and religious criteria for conservation. "A casual attitude towards natural resources is no longer acceptable," he declared.[72]

Meanwhile, he continued to visit John and Alison Busst at Bingil Bay. Their home, he wrote later, was a "mecca for friends of conservation".[73] Letters which Alison Busst gave to the James Cook University archives in 1979 included one from Webb and Geoff Tracey in 1961, recalling a discussion on development of the North and the case for a "proper scientific and conservative study of the land, before interfering with it."[74] The Tully and Innisfail branches of the United Graziers Association had lobbied in the 1950s for the opening of extra Crown land for cattle fattening. This led to two State government inquiries and a contentious finding in 1960 that 44,000ac (17,600ha) was suitable for grazing.[75] The Government then leased 51,000ac (20,400ha) of coastal country in Cardwell Shire to the US-owned King Ranch Australia Pty Ltd in 1962.[76] The letter from Webb and Tracey does not refer to any particular development scheme, but laments lobbyists' "special pleading and general obfuscation" and concludes:

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[71] Leonard Webb, "The Rape of The Forests", in A.J. Marshall (ed), *The Great Extermination,* Heinemann, London, 1966, p.197; L.J. Webb, D. Whitelock, J. Le Gay Brereton, *The Last of Lands,* Jacaranda Press, Milton, Queensland, 1969, p.xi.
[72] L. J. Webb, *Environmental Boomerang,* Jacaranda Press, Milton, Queensland, 1973, p.1, p.81.
[73] L. Webb, *Wildlife in Australia,* 1971, p.51.
[74] L. Webb and G. Tracey to John and Ali Busst, 9 April, 1961.
[75] *Evening Advocate,* 14 March, 1966. Contentious, according to this report, because the first of the government's committees of inquiry estimated 160,000ac (64,000ha) would be suitable.
[76] Lands Minister A.R. Fletcher overlooked an unpromising cost-benefit analysis from the North Queensland Land Classification Committee, the CSIRO's warning about lack of phosphates in the soil and criticism from the Labor Opposition that the land was too cheap. King Ranch also acquired freehold land and by 1969 had cleared 446 square kilometres. Len Webb considered the venture "ill-informed" (QPD, 1st session 37th Parliament 1963, speech by A.R. Fletcher, Minister for Lands, 13 October, 1963, p.1147; *T.D. Bulletin,* editorials, 28 October, 1963, 16 January, 1964; Fitzgerald, From 1915, pp.418-419; L. Webb to I. Frazer, 6 November, 2002).

> … we both think that enough talk has been spent and enough ink wasted in the rather pious articles deploring the spoliation of the Australian countryside, when without scientific or practical justification, this spoliation is repeated under the disguise of thoughtful and informed development, and to make it worse, at the expense of the public purse.[77]

John Busst's discussions with Webb and Tracey equipped him with an ecological critique of development. Busst used ecological, aesthetic and utilitarian arguments for the preservation of rainforests. Explaining his creation, the Tropical Rainforest Preservation Committee, to Harold Holt in 1965, he wrote that the diversity of species in the North's coastal ranges represented a "potential goldmine of medicinal drugs", as well as being important "from a scenic and tourist point of view", and advocated the setting aside of certain sections of the rainforest for use by scientists as outdoor laboratories

His activism was motivated by anger that in Cardwell Shire alone since 1963, a total of 87,000ac (34,800ha) of forest had been "bulldozed totally out of existence *for ever* due to cattle fattening schemes and new cane assignments and people who speculated on getting new cane assignments and did not". He believed that it was wrong to strip land bare and leave it to be ravaged by erosion, and warned that mankind would pay for disturbing the balance of ecology. The Tropical Rainforest Preservation Committee would promote conservation and husbandry of the rainforests, he wrote. His advocacy of "husbandry", while not explained, suggests Busst felt a duty to nature also expressed by Webb and Judith Wright.[78]

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[77] L. Webb and G. Tracey, Botany Department, University of Queensland, to John and Ali Busst, 9 April, 1961.

[78] John Busst to Harold Holt, 30 August, 1965, JBC/Corr/1; *The Evening Advocate,* Innisfail, 15 November, 1965, reported the formation of the Rainforest Preservation Committee, comprising John Busst, artist, Bingil Bay, Stanley Dallachy, "canefarmer and grandson of John Dallachy", Alfred McDonald, Euramo, Department of Agriculture officer, George West, Mission Beach, builder, E.H. Webb, businessman, Innisfail. Members were said to have been

He helped Webb to recast the amorphous concept of the "jungle" into the intricate, valuable and endangered "tropical rain forest". Webb's widely reported CSIRO expedition in 1965, in search of cancer cures in the coastal ranges of the Far North, helped to introduce the concept of rainforests to both northern and southern readers. However, both terms had been used in newspapers and tourist publications from the late 1930s. Charles Barrett, a syndicated newspaper nature writer, observed in 1939 that man had, year by year, encroached on the dense tropical vegetation of the "rainforests" which covered vast areas of Queensland. He also wrote of "the heart of the jungle, where the sound of the axe on living wood has not been heard for generations", and of the "jungle island" of Hinchinbrook, with mountain slopes "covered in dense rainforest".[79]

Alison Busst wrote later that the rainforest committee had been almost a "myth", with she and her husband the only effective members. Having the title on a letterhead had enabled them to seek support around the world for their cause.[80] The committee lobbied successfully for the preservation of 2860ac (1144ha) of rainforest at McNamee Creek, near Innisfail,[81] campaigned for a statutory 1.5 chain vegetation reserve to be left beside water courses on land being cleared for cane,[82] and requested a CSIRO survey of rainforests from Cardwell to the Daintree to protect useful plants

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"privately appalled" at devastation caused by the "rush to expand sugar production and open new cattle-fattening areas".

[79] Charles Barrett, *Tropical Australia,* Sun Travel Books, Melbourne, 1939, pp.15-18; *North Queensland Annual,* Brisbane, c.1969, has an advertisement for Tropical Cairns promoting the "Rain Forests and Waterfalls" of the Atherton Tableland, and stories praising the "national rain-forests" managed by the Queensland Department of Forestry and the scenic "jungle-clad slopes and precipitous escarpments" of the Herbert River Valley.

[80] Ali Busst to Brian Dalton, 3 September, 1979; JBC/Corr/14.

[81] 1967 Annual Report, Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Innisfail branch, 6 December, 1968.

[82] Report on first annual general meeting of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Innisfail branch, 8 May, 1967

from "extinction by bulldozer".[83] The committee appears to have persuaded the CSIRO to send Webb, then principal research scientist in its division of plant industry, on a two-week expedition of the coastal ranges in late 1965 to identify at-risk forest habitats. Newspapers in Innisfail and Tully emphasised the utilitarian objectives of the survey by Webb, Geoff Tracey and two zoologists from the University of Queensland, Jiro Kikkawa and Ian Straughan (originally from Atherton). Their editors followed the emphasis of a press statement from Larry Foley, with headlines such as "Homes for Mankind in Scientific Mission to North's Rainforests" and "Scientists Seeking Cancer Cure in NQ Jungle".[84] However, the *Evening Advocate* in Innisfail also canvassed spiritual and aesthetic reasons for conservation and presented an ecological rationale from Len Webb, emphasising the need for stewardship. True conservation was not passive, not merely protesting against something, but:

> learning and obeying nature's principles in order to encourage the use of our lands and waters with wisdom and foresight and so resolve the competitive demands on these resources.[85]

The *Evening Advocate* also quoted Busst as the leader of the Tropical Rainforest Preservation Committee, saying that the group was not anti-progress. In language echoing Edmund Banfield's "tread-lightly" philosophy[86] he said he supported the

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[83] *Adelaide News,* 25 November, 1965; *Tully Times,* 19 November, 1965. Both reports appear to be based on a press statement by Larry Foley, of the People for the North Committee, quoting Len Webb

[84] From the *Evening Advocate,* 15 November, 1965 and *Tully Times,* 19 November, 1965, respectively.

[85] *Evening Advocate,* 15 November. George Groom, who had campaigned for the retention of rainforest along the Palmerston Highway in the 1930s still owned and edited the *Evening Advocate* in the 1960s.

[86] E. Banfield, *the Confessions of a Beachcomber,* P.15. See Chapter 5.

development of the North, "without tramping the whole bloody paradise underfoot. Let's tread carefully, bulldozers do not."[87]

Webb and his colleagues identified 20 sites, "remnants of original vegetation … eliminated or modified by settlement" for protection as national parks or scientific reserves. In all he recommended preservation of 103,000ac (41,200ha) of rainforest from Cardwell to Cape Tribulation, on ethical and utilitarian grounds: future generations would want to see how the land once was, future researchers would need undisturbed habitat for studies of soils, plants and climate, there could be "economic" drug plants yet to be discovered. Furthermore, "many interesting and often strikingly beautiful" birds, mammals, lower vertebrates, insects and other invertebrates found only in the rainforests could be wiped out if their habitats were lost. Some could, with further study, prove to be the source of biological controls for insect pests. [88]

Webb wrote the same year, 1966, that he considered white settlement of Australia had been an "ecological catastrophe", which had disturbed the balance between human beings and nature previously maintained by Aborigines.[89] His concept of conservation was "positive in outlook and technique and … inseparable from the continued productivity of the land". Conservation to him was not a passive idea or the private hobby of a few enthusiasts, a pedantic obstruction to progress to protect something against somebody, but a "system of rational exploitation, renovation and protection of natural resources in their entirety".[90] He saw hope in the work of soil conservation services and various societies dedicated to the preservation of wild life and national parks. He believed the "genuine nature lover" needed re-

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[87] *The Evening Advocate, Innisfail,* 15 November, 1965
[88] L.J. Webb, "The Identification and Conservation of Habitat Types in Wet Tropical Lowlands of North Queensland", in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, vol. 78, no. 6, Brisbane, 28 October, 1966, pp.59-71
[89] L.J. Webb, "The Rape of the Forests", in A.J. Marshall (ed) *The Great Extermination,* 1966, p.197
[90] *Ibid.,,* pp.201-202

education to recognise signs of land abuse and to look ahead to participation in shaping landscapes which were beautiful and useful:

> The love of nature and wilderness is being broadened through understanding to a faith in the future beauty and usefulness of all landscapes, including those which are now only spectacular ruins.[91]

Webb and his three colleagues outlined their work at a public meeting in Innisfail in 1966 which led to the formation of a branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, according to a foundation member, ornithologist Billie Gill. Mrs Gill, who became the branch's first secretary, remembers meeting John Busst for the first time at this meeting.[92] In 2003, recalling her decision to join, she wrote that she had been terribly concerned about habitat damage caused chainsaws and bulldozers. Other members had included workers from the Joint Tropical Research Unit, outside Innisfail, a school teacher, a mill field officer's wife, a part-time law student and a couple of farmers. They had been "thinking kind of people":

> In those times, when the conservation movement was just beginning, the people who became involved were, I believe, much more dinkum, with genuine concern before it became the in-thing to be green.[93]

Led by Busst, the branch had a membership of 37 by May 1967. Busst co-ordinated the branch's successful appeal in the Innisfail mining warden's court in October 1967 against a farmer's application for a lease to dredge Ellison Reef, south-east of Innisfail, for agricultural lime.[94] In 1968 he joined an Australia-wide campaign to ban

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[91] *Ibid.,* p201

[92] *Evening Advovate,* Innisfail, 9 August, 1966, reported the formation of the branch, with John Busst chairman, Mrs Billie Gill secretary, Mr Alf McDonald deputy chairman and Mr Peter Wilkins treasurer; Billie Gill, of Canberra, e-mail to Ian Frazer, 21 November, 2003.

[93] Billie Gill, e-mail to Ian Frazer, 25 November, 2003. The cane farmers were Max Menzel, of Babinda, and Stan Dallachy, of Murray Upper.

[94] The Innisfail branch of the WLPSQ was among 15 objectors to the mining application by Don Forbes, secretary of the Cairns Canegrowers' executive. Their case was that the reef was alive, not dead as asserted by Forbes, and that mining would upset its ecology. The mining warden, J.W. Ashfield, accepted expert advice from marine biologist and Australian

any future mining on the reef and lobbied the Prime Minister John Gorton and Opposition leader Gough Whitlam for a 10-year moratorium, "until such time as our own and international scientists have had the opportunity to determine what is possible and what is definitely not possible".[95] He wrote to the US President Lyndon Johnson in February 1968, soon after Harold Holt's death, asking for any support he could give for a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.[96]

The Save the Reef campaign, which grew from conservationists' dismay at the Queensland Government's decision to grant offshore exploration licences to oil companies, led to a joint Commonwealth-State Royal Commission from 1970 to 1974, to assess the risks of drilling.[97] Public opinion against despoliation of the reef resulted in four Commonwealth Government Acts, from 1972 to 1975, establishing the Australian Institute of Marine Science in Townsville, delineating State and Commonwealth authority over coastal waters, regulating coastal development, and establishing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.[98] This presumably would have pleased Busst, who thought it ridiculous for governments to leave protection of one of the wonders of the world to "a few private individuals and small societies with limited funds".[99]

Conservation Foundation director Dr Don McMichael, that mining should not be permitted before the reef's resources were properly assessed. J. Wright, *The Coral Battleground,* pp.6-14, *The Australian,* 8 May, 1968. *T.D. Bulletin,* 6 October, 1967, Hutton and Connors, p.101.

[95] J. Busst to John Gorton, 27 August, 1968, JBC/corr/14, J. Busst to Gough Whitlam, 27 August, 1968

[96] J. Busst to Lyndon B.Johnson, 12 February, 1968, JBC/corr/14.

[97] James and Margarita Bowen, *The Great Barrier Reef,* pp.335-350. An oil spill from the *Oceanic Grandeur* off Cape York on March 3, 1970, precipitated the joint Royal Commission. In 1974, the commissioners endorsed the findings of the 1971 Senate Select Committee on Offshore Petroleum Resources that "present knowledge of the Reef was extremely inadequate, whether in terms … of marine biology or any other of the marine sciences.".

[98] These were *The Australian Institute of Marine Science Act,* of 1972, the *Seas and Submerged Lands Act* of 1973, the *Environment protection Act* of 1974 and the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act* of 1975, Peter Bell, *AIMS: The First Twenty-Five Years,* Australian Institute of Marine Science, 1998, p.22

[99] 1967 annual report, W.L.P.S.Q., Innisfail branch

Busst, who died on April 5, 1971, aged 61, wrote often of his rationale for conservation without discussing personal motivations. His activism can perhaps be seen as the late flowering of a *noblesse oblige* honed at Wesley College by headmaster L.A. Adamson, mentor of future Prime Ministers, judges, doctors, academics and clerics.[100] He badgered his friends in high places to protect the reef and rainforests, but did not accuse, belittle or talk down to his fellow citizens in the litanies of environmental ills listed in his annual reports.[101] He might have enjoyed networking, but he made light of his lofty connections.[102] Webb saw him as a "practical artist" and an earnest, open and enthusiastic man who had gradually become active in nature conservation during their friendship of 24 years.[103] He considered that his achievements included saving Ellison Reef, instigating the Royal Commission on the Great Barrier Reef and inspiring "the growing, sparkling tide of conservation-minded people, young and old, in North Queensland particularly". His repeated advice in every campaign had been "start at the top", which had been easy for him because of his background and connections.[104]

Busst's advocacy combined idealism and pragmatism. He welcomed the reef's status, in 1970, as Australia's top tourist attraction and predicted Jumbo Jets would bring even more visitors to spread awareness of the reef's beauty. Tourism was a

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[100] G. Blainey, J. Morrissey, S.E.K. Hulme, *Wesley College The First Hundred Years,* The President and Council Wesley College Melbourne, Melbourne, 1967, pp.156-159.
[101] Busst's first annual report to the Innisfail WPSQ branch listed nine activities, including a proposal for the State government to offer land tax breaks to encourage landholders to leave 1.5chains of natural vegetation either side of water courses, to prevent soil erosion, stream saltation and protect "fast-diminishing natural habitats".
[102] L. Webb, tribute, 1971: "He was a humanist with an immediate and relaxed ability to communicate with young people, bureaucrats, professors and prime ministers; domestic animals: coral-studded seascapes and hills with sombre trees: a man, indeed, who – with his wife – matched action with words in donations, including rain forest land, to the cause of conservation in the Queensland tropics".
[103] L. Webb to I. Frazer, 6 November, 2002, Webb regarded Busst as a "practical artist", who built his own house and furniture at Bedarra, but who struggled to capture the "thousand hues" of the sea in his art.
[104] L. Webb to I. Frazer, 6 November 2002; L. Webb, "To Drop Quietly From a Twig", tribute to John Busst, *Wildlife in Australia,* Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, 1971, P.57

$200 million industry worth safeguarding, he wrote.[105] He appealed to the patriotism of the Innisfail branch of the Young Australian Country Party, in 1968, to support a complete ban on mining exploration of the reef, by characterising the proposed drilling by a Japanese company as "foreign exploitation".[106] He stressed to Rotarians at Tully the international status of scientists who wanted the "unique Australian heritage" of the rainforests protected.[107] The Innisfail branch sought government incentives for farmers to control erosion and protect "fast-diminishing natural habitats".[108] Busst's letter to Lyndon Johnson seeking his support for the creation of a Great Barrier Reef marine park emphasised the reef's recreational potential. It had been the late Prime Minister Harold Holt's "number one choice for spear fishing", but now its sheer beauty was threatened by commercial interests.[109] Busst was praised after his death for hating compromise, and for convincing the Great Barrier Reef Committee to oppose oil-drilling on the reef, instead of supporting controlled exploitation. "The control of exploitation, once it has begun, exists only as a myth in the minds of those who advocate it," he is said to have written.[110] Yet his utilitarian arguments for protecting the reef for the sake of science and tourism implied compromise. Harold Holt could presumably use his spear gun without causing too much harm and the tourists enjoying the reef's "incalculable" aesthetic value would presumably have to take care they were not part of the human interference which Busst suspected as a cause of the Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreak of the 1960s.[111]

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[105] Annual report, Innisfail branch WPSQ, 2 February 1970 (JBC/MR/1)
[106] *Evening Advocate*, 29 November, 1968.
[107] *Tully Times,* 11 March, 1966.
[108] Annual report, Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Innisfail branch, 8 May, 1967 (JBC/MR/1), The branch supported a proposal by the Tropical Rainforest Preservation Committee, of Bingil Bay, for rebates on land tax as an incentive for landowners to preserve vegetation around water courses and on the verges of roads.
[109] J. Busst to Lyndon B. Johnson, 12 February, 1968.
[110] Wright, p.189, citing Barry Wain's tribute in *Nation,* 1 May, 1971.
[111] 1967 annual report of W.L.P.S.Q, Innisfail branch, issued 2 February, 1968; also reported in the *Evening Advocate,* 19 March, 1968.

Could the reef be recognised as "one of the most unique and easily accessible science laboratories in the world"[112] without being exploited, to some degree? Was there ultimately a difference between exploitation and "ruthless exploitation" such as that threatened by the oil companies with permits to drill on the reef?[113]

To Judith Wright, Busst was essentially an artist and lover of beauty "who fought that man and nature might survive". This was her epitaph to him, carved on stone on a hillside at Bingil Bay[114] There is evidence that he regarded the North as a paradise, unlike any other in the world,[115] and pitied anyone living in the South.[116] His life on Bedarra Island consisted of building, painting, boating, swimming and learning about the forests and reefs.[117] Zara Holt called Bedarra "Dream Island", and characterised the vegetation and climate as fertile and virile. Later, Busst treated Bingil Bay as his "private paradise", where happiness was one more year without a sealed road.[118]

Outrage at the mauling of his beautiful world was never far from the surface of his arguments for protection of the reef and rainforest, guided by Len Webb and Judith Wright. He wrote in his first report to the Innisfail branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland that Australia risked being regarded as a nation of barbarians who destroyed one of the seven wonders of the world, and in 1969 that drilling the reef for oil threatened to become "one of the most spectacular pieces of vandalism yet created by western man".[119] His activism, while clothed in

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[112] *Ibid.,*
[113] 1969 annual report of W.L.P.S.Q, Innisfail branch, 14 April, 1970.
[114] J. Wright, *The Coral Battleground,* pp.198-190.
[115] *Evening Advocate,* 28 November, 1968, "The North Queensland rainforests are unique anywhere in the world in their diversity of species. The rainforest jungles of South America and Borneo do not posses this rare quality."
[116] *Nation,* 1 May, 1971, "John Busst went to North Queensland from Melbourne in 1940 and thenceforth declared anyone residing south of Cairns was off his head."
[117] Wright, Coral Reef Battleground, p.4.
[118] *Nation,* I May, 1971.
[119] 1969 annual report, W.L.P.S.Q, Innisfail branch.

utilitarianism, was charged by the moral judgements about the use and abuse of land and a sense of responsibility to future generations and of culpability for spoiling the "precious heritage" of finely balanced evolutionary and ecological processes.[120] His approach seems to have been informed by Webb's observations on nature as an entity to be respected and guarded by man[121] and Wright's advocacy in 1968 for a "new kind of creative relationship" with nature, in which man neither becomes part of the story of triumphant conquering of the land, nor lapses into despair over self-inflicted problems.[122] However, he was also prepared to appeal to a public with a cultivated taste for scenery, and no appetite for the type of engagement with nature recommended by Webb and Wright.

Overview

Studying native flora and fauna led members of Cairns and Townsville naturalists' groups into public advocacy for nature conservation. The objects of the North Queensland Naturalists' Club, established in 1932, to promote and preserve the "natural glories of North Queensland" carried the possibility of conflict with agencies indifferent to these treasures.[123] In its first mention of the club, *The North Queensland Register* reported that Hugo Flecker had approached Cairns City Council to rescue orchids from trees which had been felled for the Barron Falls hydro-electric scheme.[124] Flecker listed the club's achievements, in 1937, as having included

[120] *Evening Advocate,* 19 March, 1968.
[121] Webb, Environmental Boomerang, p.96.
[122] Wright, Conservation as a concept, p.30.
[123] *The North Queensland Naturalist,* vol 33, No. 140, May 1966, listed the club's objects as "the furtherance of the study of the various branches of natural history and the preservation of our heritage of indigenous flora and fauna"; Dr H. Flecker, "North Queensland – A Naturalists' Paradise", *The Queensland Naturalist,* February, 1937, "this club was established in 1932 at a meeting convened by the Mayor of Cairns with a view to attracting the attention of visitors to the natural glories of North Queensland".
[124] *N.Q. Register,* Cairns Notes, 17 September, 1932. The Lands Department salvaged the orchids for the Railways Department to use for beautification purposes;

limiting spearing of fish at Green Island, having had the *Rhododendron Lochae* placed on the list of protected plants and having checked the exodus of Cuscus from Cape York Peninsula. He welcomed the state government's decision to over-ride a proposal by Cairns City Council to rezone part of Green Island for tourist accommodation and a tennis court. The club appears to have lobbied for protection of both Green Island and Michaelmas Cay against damage caused by increasing tourism.[125] Nine members volunteered to be rangers to protect Green Island in 1944.[126] Jean Devanny, the club's assistant secretary, wrote to the *Cairns Post* in 1946 asking why there had been no provision to pay rangers to patrol forests and the reef during the war[127]

Members included the chief executive officer of the Cairns Harbour Board, J. Wyer, who said in 1951, reflecting on 18 years as secretary, that while he was not a naturalist he had been inspired by the club's ideals, which he considered "for the ultimate benefit of the land we live in".[128] With experts in fields ranging from ornithology to geology, the "Cairns Nats" provided a well-credentialed rallying point for supporters of campaigns such as their effort to save the Abbot Street fig tree. Nature lovers with conservation concerns sought support for their causes, for example Herbert River district farmer and honorary native fauna protection officer E.C. Morris enlisted the club's help in 1957 to protect the "last retreat" of endangered scrub fowls in his district.[129] The experts also identified specimens sent by collectors around

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[125] Dr H. Flecker, "North Queensland – A Naturalists' Paradise", *The Queensland Naturalist,* February, 1937, pp.20-24; *N.Q. Register*, 17 September, 1932, reported that members had been asked to become more conversant with the Reef to act as guides to tourists; *Cairns Post,* September 14, 1944, reported the club had asked the Department of Harbours to ban sale of marine products on the island. Nine members volunteered to act as voluntary rangers.
[126] Jean Devanny, letter to *Cairns Post*, 14 September, 1944, in JCU library archives, [JD/PP/306]
[127] *Ibid.,* letter to *Cairns Post*, 2 October, 1946 [JD/PP/308]
[128] *The North Queensland Naturalist,* 1 March, 1951, vol 18, No. 93.
[129] *Ibid., Evening Advocate,* Innisfail, 10 October, 1957; *Herbert River Express,* 12 February, 1950, reported the appointment of E.C. Morris, of Tokalon Siding, as an honorary protector.

Australia, as the club became recognised as the accepted authority on natural history in North Queensland.[130]

The Townsville and District Natural History Society, established in 1947 to conserve and study natural history, botany, anthropology and archaeology, appears to have campaigned successfully to stop sand-mining at Rowes Bay but could not stop plans to turn part of the Town Common into a golf course.[131] The society's president and founder Keith Kennedy asserted in April 1968 that the group had been instrumental in preventing the beach at Rowes Bay from being destroyed by sand mining. This had been one of many battles waged when few other societies and naturalists' clubs existed in Queensland:

> The work of the society has been long and hard during the years when it was not the fashion to try to preserve the bush creatures and flowers of our unique countryside. The general public of Queensland is not, on the whole, interested and the society is determined to try and make them just a little more conscious of the need to defend wildlife about us.[132]

Kennedy, a music teacher, botanist and one-time manager of the ABC radio station in Townsville, announced in April 1968 that the group had been renamed the Townsville and District Natural History Society and Wildlife Preservation Society. He welcomed the formation of preservation groups in other parts of Queensland without directly mentioning the Townsville branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of

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[130] *The North Queensland Naturalist,* 1 March, 1951; Devanny, *Bird of Paradise,* p.80.
[131] *The Townsville Naturalist,* vol 6, No. 1, April, 1968; QPD, 1964-65, vol 238, pp.164-165, The North Queensland Golf Association initially sought a special lease of 143ac of the Town Common in 1965; The association increased the area to 203ac in March, 1966. The government granted the lease, despite a "Save the Common campaign", *The North Queensland Naturalist,* October, 1967.
[132] *The Townsville Naturalist,* Vol 6, No. 1.

Queensland, which met for the first time in March, 1968. His group's objectives, from the outset, had been the conservation of fauna, flora and marine life, he wrote.[133]

Members of The Townsville and District Natural History Society explored the Town Common and adjoining Many Peaks Range, Shelly Beach and Rowes Bay on field trips. Kennedy and his wife, Elizabeth, seem to have adopted the fauna sanctuary as theirs to care for during visits beginning with their arrival in North Queensland in 1935. Elizabeth Kennedy, an ornithologist and editor of the society's journal, wrote in 1964 that the proposed golf links would rob birds and animals of their territory and feeding grounds, and turn natural beauty into man-made ugliness.[134] Botanist Dr Betsy Jacques, who moved from Brisbane to Townsville in 1964 to work at the Townsville University College, attended their meetings in 1965. She said in an interview in 2002 she remembered her 30 or so fellow members as having come from all walks of life. There were fishing enthusiasts, orchid growers, gardeners and birdwatchers and "the naturalists of the time". Keith Kennedy was a "fantastic naturalist". She was unaware of the controversy over the Town Common and did not remember the group being much involved in advocacy for native flora and fauna. Specialists, such as members of two rival orchid groups, preciously guarded their bailiwick of knowledge. The general population in 1965, while aware of native plants and animals, seemed complacent about conservation:

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[133] Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Townsville branch archives, letter from Stanley E. Mote to Mr [Arthur] Fenton, WLPSQ, Brisbane, 28 March, 1968; *The Townsville Naturalist,* vol 6, No. 1.

[134] *The North Queensland Naturalist,* 1 September 1949, 1 March, 1951, carried reports of "Townsville and District Naturalists Club" outings to Mount Marlowe, in the many Peaks Range, Shelly Beach and the Town Common; *The Townsville Naturalist,* Vol 5, No. 3, September, 1964; *The Townsville Naturalist,* April, 1968, records that the Kennedys came to the North in 1935.

> Townsville had only been growing slowly. They saw miles and miles of melaleuca woodland going up the coast. It didn't occur to them that there would be all this housing development up there and we should do something abut it[135]

Dr Jacques transferred to Mackay for three years from 1968, the year of the formation of the Townsville branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland.

Stanley Mote, the honorary fauna and flora ranger who instigated the establishment of the branch, invited Keith Kennedy to join, but Kennedy declined because of a grievance against the society's Brisbane office, stemming from the Town Common campaign.[136] Mote appears to have been motivated by his existing membership of the society and the conviction that others would join if there was a local branch. He believed the branch could help educate local people whom he described as unresponsive to new ideas and lacking feeling for flora and fauna, "unless they (considered) are of some value".[137] The W.P.S.Q. had been born in Brisbane in 1962 in response to what its founders described as Press reports of "growing vandalism and lack and knowledge an interest in wildlife conservation and in Australia's unique flora and fauna". Its aims were similar to, but more sharply focussed than either of the existing naturalists' groups in Townsville and Cairns. These objectives included preservation of native flora and fauna by any lawful means, including public education and discouragement of its wanton destruction.[138]

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[135] Dr Betsy Jacques, interview with Ian Frazer, 7 April, 2002, copy in Oral History Collection, History Department, JCU.
[136] Townsville branch WPSQ Archive, Stanley E. Mote to A [Arthur] Fenton, 6 January, 1968; Arthur Fenton to Stanley E. Mote, undated [January 1968], said the society had been unable to give Kennedy information requested in 1964 on the variety and number of birds breeding in the Common, details of migratory birds and other information on which to base an informed protest. The society had not replied to his letter.
[137] *Ibid.,,* S.E. Mote to The Secretary, The Wildlife Preservation Society, Brisbane, 11 August, 1966; Stanley E. Mote to A. Fenton, 28 February, 1968.
[138] *Ibid.,* Undated Press release signed by Judith Wright, Kathleen McArthur, David Fleay and Brian Coulston [First meeting 6 September, 1962, this paper late August]; The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Rules.

The Townsville branch concentrated on public education in 1968 and 1969. Guest speakers included Vincent Serventy, editor of the society's magazine, *Wildlife in Australia,* in May 1968 and Eddie Hergel, director of the Queensland Littoral Society, in June 1969. Stan Mote, publicity officer in 1969, reminded readers of *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* that the branch aimed to protect coral reefs and marine life in the Townsville area, along with many other objectives. Members followed in the footsteps of the natural history society when they organised rubbish collection from the Town Common to mark Keep Townsville Tidy Week in 1969. Their contribution to the Save The Reef campaign included selling bumper stickers for the Queensland Littoral Society. Membership reached 70 by the end of 1969, including several lecturers from the Townsville University College, soon to become James Cook University.[139]

Dr George Heinsohn, a US-born biology lecturer, steered the branch into what he described as a "watch dog" role during his presidency, beginning in 1971. Members made field trips to areas of concern, such as Many Peaks Range, where the Commonwealth planned to build two radar stations and Saunders Beach, near the site of the Yabulu nickel refinery. They collected 245 signatures on a petition against the Many Peaks Range development. However, they seem to have generally had a wider focus than the earlier naturalists' societies. The branch collected 650 signatures on a "Save The Rain Forest" petition organised by the W.P.S.Q's Tableland branch. Heinsohn compiled the branch's response to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Wildlife Conservation in 1970, which in draft form argued for establishment of a Commonwealth conservation authority, a minimum of 10 per cent of land to be set aside for national parks and removal of native fauna from declared

[139] *Ibid.,* undated clippings from *T.D. Bulletin,* 1968, 1969; *T.D.Bulletin,* 28 August, 1969, "Clean-up for Common"; 1970 Annual Report W.P.S.Q. Townsville branch; W.P.S.Q. Townsville branch, list of members, 1968-1971.

"pest" lists, pending ecological studies. Locally, the branch called for research into effects of pollution in Cleveland Bay and the Herbert River and an investigation of heavy use of pesticides in tobacco and sugar-growing areas and discharge of wastes from sugar mills and meatworks.[140]

Summing up 1971-72, Heinshohn said his vision had been to promote the wise use of natural resources and to maintain and improve the present "liveable and enjoyable environment" for future generations. This could be done most effectively if members attended meetings and field trips and saw "conservation problems" first-hand. The club's membership, static for two years, needed to "show greater active awareness and concern about what is happening to our North Queensland environment".[141] He recognised implicitly the link between stewardship and nature conservation activism identified by Webb and Wright.

Writing in 1998, Libby Robin contrasted the activism of pre-World War II natural history enthusiasts and 1970s urban environmentalism. She argued that what really motivated the old-style nature conservationists was the fear that their ownership of, or at least intimacy with nature was at risk, not that nature itself was threatened. Conservationists of the 1960s and 1970s, in contrast, defended threatened habitats, while urban environmentalists, fearing all human habitat was about to disappear, displayed concern for a nature they had never seen, for a wilderness "without needing to be there". Nature, in this analysis, informed by Roderick Nash, Richard Mabey and others, had become an active subject, not merely a passive resource.[142]

Busst appears to have believed that symbols and images were the way to reach people with no time to gain a sense of stewardship through formal nature expeditions.

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[140] *Ibid,,* Draft, W.P.S.Q, Townsville branch, to House of Representatives Select Committee on Wildlife Conservation, undated.
[141] *Ibid,,* Annual report of the Townsville Branch of W.P.S.Q., 1971-72
[142] Robin, Defending Little Desert, p.40. Robin cites Richard Mabey, *The Common Ground,* Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind.*

He wrote in 1967 that public screening of nature films was an "extremely important" was of promoting wildlife preservation.[143] He, Webb and Wright recognised that for many of their supporters the Great Barrier Reef was a symbol, inevitably experienced in its minutiae, whether through the hand-coloured pictures in Saville-Kent's books, a glimpse of coral at low tide, through the observatory window at Green Island, divers' goggles, or Kenneth Slessor's images of "flower turned to stone' and "stone turned to flowers". Wright had seen the reef only once, at Lady Elliott Island, but this was no barrier to her championing of its other-worldly spirit.[144]

Paradoxically, this approach relegated nature, for example in the Great Barrier Reef, to the status of a passive resource, valuable scenery facing ruin should oil drilling proceed. Neither Webb nor Wright said much about how to achieve the mesh between human beings and nature which they and Archbishop Bernardini believed would achieve good stewardship. By 1970, North Queensland's cane growers were less likely to achieve it on their increasingly mechanised farms. Wright wrote pessimistically about the degradation of coastal areas in the early 1970s, despite progress in "saving" the reef. Problems included pollution from fertilisers, pesticides, mining wastes and sugar mill effluent and dredging and reclamation of mangroves for tourist developments.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter I have found little direct evidence of friction between conservationist and farmers in the 1960s. Opposition leader John Duggan's warning in 1965 against approaching landholders with a bullying "big brother" attitude perhaps suggests certain farmers resented being blamed for riverbank

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[143] Billie Gill, e-mail to in Frazer, 25 November, 2003; Annual report Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Innisfail branch, 8 May, 1967 (JBC/MR/1).

[144]Kenneth Slessor, "Five Visions of Captain Cook", quoted by J. Wright, *The Coral Battleground,* introduction, xiii. Wright wrote that her own image of the spirit of the Reef was "a dancing creature of crimson and yellow, rippling all over like a wind-blown shawl", a Spanish Dancer, shell-less mollusc which she saw on her only excursion to the Reef, at Lady Elliott island, pp.187-188.p.147.

soil erosion.[145] Edwin Wallis-Smith, MLA for Tablelands, noted in 1968 that people living "far away from what we call control", might resist restrictions and regulations for the greater good of conservation. Speaking during debate on the Forestry Act Amendment Bill, he said residents of such remote areas, even the closely settled Atherton Tablelands, were more like to accept regulations in National Parks when they understood conservation was for recreation, historic, scientific and other purposes, and not simply an exercise in "control".[146] Some of the farmers I interviewed between 1999 and 2002 defended their practices against criticisms of conservationists. Les Searle, a cane farmer at Airdmillan since 1944 wrote to me in 1999 that he considered conservation and sustainability had always been key farming concepts. "Farmers have always been conscious to maintain the productivity of their land," he wrote.[147] However, I cannot say whether he and other farmers in North Queensland felt particularly stigmatised or demonised by non-farming critics in the 1960s.

Summing up the campaign to save the reef, Wright said its success had depended on convincing the Australian people that it belonged to them and was in danger.[148] She hoped that "human attitudes, social and industrial forces" would change, as they had to some extent during the campaign.[149]There is no puzzling altruism in Busst's advocacy. The "calm, lazy blue seas" of the reef lagoon lapped virtually at his front veranda. He cared for his "front garden", as Barry Wain put it,[150] because of the pleasure it had given him for 30 years, but also because he saw its potential for human use, both as science laboratory and tourists' playground. Busst,

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[145] *QPD,* vol. 241, 1965, pp.282-289.
[146] *QPD,* vol 249, 3rd sess 38th Pmt, 1968, pp.996-997.
[147] Les Searle to Ian Frazer, 29 November, 1999.
[148] Wright, *The Coral Reef Battleground,* p. 159.
[149] *Ibid.,,* pp. 184-186.
[150] *Ibid.,,* p.161; *Nation,* 1 May, 1971, p. 14.

like a careful farmer, exercised stewardship for future generations, to save Australia from condemnation as the barbarians who destroyed one of the Seven Wonders of the World.[151]

[151] W.L.P.S.Q, Innisfail branch, 1967 annual report, 2 February, 1968.

Conclusions

European settlers were more than mere agents of capitalism and imperialism, conscripted into the tropics to exploit and defend the region. They contested ballots for blocks of scrub and jungle because they believed the rhetoric of the closer-settlement movement, that life in the country was happier and healthier than in towns and that farming carried a chance of achieving security and prosperity. They cleared and farmed under the guidance of experience, intuition and science. They reshaped nature into the image presented on the masthead of *The North Queensland Register* in the 1920s and 30s: a land of fat cattle, lush pastures, bending cane, steam trains and mines. Their sugar cane plantings increased tenfold, from 23,817ac (9526ha) to 288,895ac (103,438ha) between 1901 and 1970, and population increased from 23,397 to 105, 523. Nearly 70 per cent lived in Townsville, proclaimed by the People the North Committee as the largest white settlement in the tropics.[1]

The farmers in my study have said little directly about their attitudes to nature, stewardship of the land, or whether they were aware of their responsibilities for nation-building and national defence. I see the evidence of Neils Christian Rosendahl to the 1889 sugar industry Royal Commission as typical of the attitude of many small-scale sugar growers in later decades: "I have never been anything but a farmer, and have always been working on a farm. I cannot say that I am very prosperous, but I should like to stick to it." Reading between the lines, Rosendahl, who represented the Herbert River Farmers' Association at the hearing, seems to have been content to

[1] *V&P*, 1901, Department of Agriculture annual report, p.29; *The Australian Sugar Year Book,* vol 31, 1972, production figures from Innisfail, Herbert and Burdekin districts; QPP, 1902, vol.3 of 3, Census of Queensland, 1901; C of A, *Census of Population and Housing, 1971,* Canberra, 1973; *Innisfail Advocate,* 1 September, 1964.

have “made a home” and to have been prepared to wait for a good season for the cane which covered most of his cleared country.[2] Making a home meant studying, reshaping and living with nature in the tropics - a vigorous, generous and capricious force. Pioneers such as Rosendahl, and the farmers who followed them exercised stewardship of cleared and ploughed lands and imported crops. I have searched for their history in some of the records of 10 sugar mill districts. However, there is scope for an intensive study of a single community with a relatively stable group of producers, such as Macknade, on the Herbert River, to examine the impact of both World Wars on farming practices and how their rationale for living on the land changed. Further study of town-dwellers is also warranted. How different were their attitudes to nature to those of their brothers and sisters in “the bush”?

The stewardship practised by farmers, in fallowing, fertilising, saving shade trees and repairing riverbank erosion, was generally driven by utilitarian motives. During a parliamentary debate in 1887, Justin Foxton, the conservative MLA for Carnarvon and later Lands Minister, summed up the difference between this form of stewardship and the altruistic variety. Who but a patriot would accept restrictions on his present income for the benefit of a future age? Foxton asked. He was pessimistic about the degree of support from professional fishermen for proposed legislation to restrict commercial netting.[3]

Judith Wright recognised John Busst as a type of patriot in her epitaph which acknowledged him as an artist and lover of beauty, “who fought that man and nature may survive”. Although Busst was radicalised by the threat of damage to his neighbourhood at Bingil Bay, he campaigned to save for posterity the beauty of all of the Reef and potential bounty of the rainforests. Other prominent members of the

[2] R.C in Sugar Industry in Queensland, 1889, p.110.
[3] *QPD,* vol.LII, 1887, 5th sess, 9th Pmt, 13 September, 1887, pp.665-666.

Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Judith Wright and Len Webb, argued that the best hope for conservation of nature lay with individuals taking responsibility for its stewardship in what Wright called a new kind of creative relationship.[4] Nature was a life process that humans could nurture or destroy, according to Wright. Busst recognised the Reef as a construction best understood in symbols and images, and campaigned strongly to protect it as lucrative tourist attraction.[5] The successful campaign to stop oil drilling on the reef was based more on its amenity value for tourists than on its value as a living habitat.

Supporters of closer-settlement idealised a society wedded to nature in the form of "the land" or "the bush". In 1930, the commissioners who investigated development of North Queensland saw farming as an antidote to social unrest in Australia's "impoverished cities".[6] Charles Bryde promoted "the spirit of the romance of pioneering" in his account of opening a dairy farming block on the Atherton Tableland, in the World War I era. His hero appreciated "the beauty of old mother nature" while felling scrub.[7] Farmers generally did not see their practices as harmful or wasteful and trusted in Providence and science to ameliorate losses and enhance profits. They viewed the earth as a bountiful and eternal presence, rather than as a place of fragile relationships between delicate life forms. Edmund Banfield could afford to "tread lightly" on Dunk Island, having decided he and his wife could subsist off his income from his writing and the produce of four and a half acres. He aimed for minimal interference on the island, which he had declared a bird sanctuary, but had no desire to preserve the North as a "desolate and silent wilderness". He imagined that

[4] Wright, Conservation as a Concept, p.30.
[5] *Evening Advocate,* 27 March, 1968; WPSQ, Innisfail branch, report of annual general meeting, 2 February, 1970 [JBC/MR/1]
[6] R.C. on Development of North Queensland, pp.17-17.
[7] Bryde, Chart House*,* pp.62, 102.

some day millions of people would both draw near to nature and produce immense wealth in the North.[8]

Legislators who enacted a series of ineffectual fauna, flora and fisheries protection laws from the 1870s onwards appear to have intended to reinforce moral sanctions on abuses of nature. While the pioneers and farmers had faith in the resilience and bounty of the bush, there was a consensus that some acts of despoliation were beyond the pale. Wasteful acts, whether involving the death of insectivorous birds or the destruction of valuable timber and orchids, were regarded as particularly shameful. Nature lovers who formed groups in Cairns and Townsville to promote and conserve native flora and fauna reminded the public of these values.

Perhaps present-day friction between farmers and conservationists stems from conflicting views on the resilience of nature, and a clash between utilitarian and altruistic forms of stewardship. Early evidence of this conflict can be found in indirect criticism of riverbank clearing by the Innisfail branch of the W.P.S.Q in 1967. As already stated, a founding member of the branch, Billie Gill, says that canefarmers regarded their group as "a bunch of nitwits".[9] There was little common ground between farmers and the theorists of the W.P.S.Q. Farmers were not really co-workers with nature in the way Wright advocated. By the 1960s they had become technicians overseeing mechanical processes to maximise the productivity of their land. They were happy with their microcosm of nature, which boasted the "liquid gold" of the Burdekin River aquifer and Australian record rainfall averages in the Tully district. Being seemingly so well blessed by Providence, why should they have taken interest in a construction of nature which enmeshed all life and would have entailed them taking responsibility, ultimately, for the well-being of all life? On the other hand, this

[8]Banfield, Confessions, pp. xvi, 15, 26, 47, 43.
[9] W.P.S.Q, Innisfail branch, 1967 annual report (JBC/MR/1); Billie Gill, e-mail to Ian Frazer, 21 November, 2003.

consciousness left activists who chose to be lieutenants of Providence with an impossibly long list of wrongs to be righted. In the 1970s and 80s their solicitude for nature became, in the hands of the state, the blunt and contentious instrument of environmental management. Sparks from the friction between farmers and conservationists of the 1990s which inspired my study can be found in the 1960s. But 30 years later the umbrage of cane farmers recalled by Billie Gill, and the “us-and-them” arguments of Judith Wright had grown into a discourse of name-calling and demonisation which did nothing to promote or encourage stewardship of the land.

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