

half of the sawmills will run out of rainforest timber by the end of 1986. Meanwhile they will wipe out the richest unmodified tropical rainforest in Queensland. The Queensland Forestry Department heavily subsidises logging by building access roads and charging very low royalties for timber. It is stubbornly attempting to develop a sustained yield logging system for the forest, despite the fact that it has now largely gone. However, just as on the West Coast, the demands of the sawmilling industry far exceed the natural regeneration of the forest, even if selective logging trials prove successful (which seems unlikely).

Australian conservation groups have united to seek protection of the country's last remaining tropical rainforests. They believe that if wealthy Australia is not prepared to protect them, there is little hope that less affluent countries will do so.

The most successful and effective of these groups, in my opinion, is the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, which operates on a similar level to Forest and Bird. Most Australian groups are dominated by their membership in the large cities; however, WPSQ is made up of a large number of branches spread throughout small rural centres of Queensland. Each of these branches develops a strong regional identity and runs field trips and meetings, focussing community awareness on nature and conservation problems.

### Alternatives to logging

Rural electorates are immensely powerful under the Queensland gerrymander, and therefore the WPSQ's high standing has helped it influence politicians much more than urban-dominated groups — especially those from other states.

The battle to save Downey Creek is spearheaded by the WPSQ Innisfail branch led by Yvonne Cunningham. The thrust of their campaign has been to identify job alternatives which do not threaten the rainforest. Over-mature state plantations of hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) and Queensland kauri (*Agathis robusta*) have been suggested as an immediate alternative to logging Downey Creek. In the longer term there will be a huge increase in the supply of these plantation timbers in North Queensland over the next ten years. However, the Forestry Department is resisting a change to plantation timbers, determined to prove that it can "manage" natural forest even though its trial covers virtually all the remaining vine forest.

Tourism is booming in the sunny climes of North Queensland. The WPSQ has capi-



Left: Buff breasted paradise kingfisher, the most spectacular of Australia's ten kingfisher species. Birds migrate from New Guinea in the spring and nest inside chambers in termite mounds on the tropical rainforest floor.

Photo Ralph and Daphne Kellar, from Greater Daintree

Right: Yvonne Cunningham, of the Innisfail branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland has spearheaded efforts to protect Downey Creek and use it for nature tourism.

Photo: G. McSweeney

talised on this by preparing plans for a \$5 million rainforest nature tourism centre for Downey Creek, featuring a canopy walkway. This would enable tourists to approach the most exciting level of a tropical rainforest — especially at night. Only in the canopy can the great diversity of flowers, fruits, orchids and perching ferns be seen. Numerous mammals, bats, birds and butterflies visit this zone throughout the day and night. Canopy walkways are already in operation in some Malaysian national parks where they have proved very popular.

Yvonne Cunningham is immensely pragmatic when questioned about the effect of the walkway on the forest.

"3,000 of the 8,000 hectare Downey Creek catchment is scheduled for logging. More than 1,000 hectares has already been cut. Our nature tourism centre could save this superb forest from destruction. The visitor facilities could be developed very carefully — it would have to be because if we damage the forest no-one is going to come here to see the trees and the wildlife."

### Will they act?

Her proposal is gathering support throughout North Queensland from the tourist industry, local Chambers of Commerce and even local members of Parliament. However, the question is whether they will act to stop the logging at Downey and road expansion at Daintree before the remain-

ing rainforest is irreversibly damaged. Even the forester in charge of the Downey Creek logging operation, Tom Just admits "This bush will never be the same again because the big trees will not be there."

Nationally, efforts to save Queensland tropical rainforest focus on getting the forests accepted as a World Heritage Site. Already they have been recommended for such status by the Australian Heritage Commission. However, mindful of the Franklin river dam debate in Tasmania where the Federal Government overruled the Tasmanian Government and saved the Franklin, the Queensland Government steadfastly refuses to allow its rainforests to be nominated as a World Heritage Site.

Without State Government consent, the Australian Federal Government will not intercede to save the tropical rainforests or nominate them for World Heritage Status. And so the battle rages.

Queensland is a remarkably lucky state in a very lucky country. It is huge in area, rich in resources and immensely scenic and diverse. It is also one of the few politically stable and physically safe countries where visitors can discover and enjoy the richest of tropical rainforest ecosystems.

New Zealanders should be concerned for the future of Queensland's rainforests. They are some of the most accessible such forests for us and share many close links with our forests. Their continued unnecessary loss is a tragedy. 🦘

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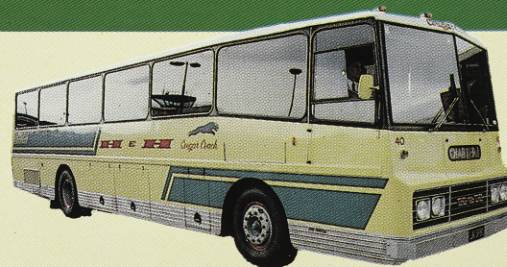
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Australian environmental groups have invited Forest and Bird members to write to the Queensland Premier urging him to protect Queensland's tropical rainforests. Write to Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen, Parliament House, Brisbane, 4,000. If you need more information don't hesitate to write to me. You never know, one day we might have to invite the Australians to reciprocate with our Government!

The author acknowledges the assistance of an ANZAC fellowship for a four month conservation study tour in Australia in early 1985. Queensland conservation groups and the Queensland Department of Forestry also provided generous help.