

As if for a thousand years ...

Sunday 24 November 2019

In 1968 Sir William (Black Jack) McDonald, a local pastoralist and Minister for Lands controversially announced a new rural settlement scheme which involved the clearing of remnant Mallee woodlands and then selling Crown Land in the Little Desert.

An unlikely alliance of farmers, agricultural experts, economists, suburban activists, politicians, scientists and conservationists including the local District Forester Bill Middleton, banded together to oppose McDonald's plan.

The Age Newspaper was fiercely critical and ran months of reports and editorials opposing the proposal.

The poorly-conceived scheme was eventually consigned to oblivion, but it proved a watershed moment and is often considered to mark the beginning of widespread environmental awareness and activism in Victoria.

The surprise electoral backlash over the Little Desert against the Bolte Government in the May 1970 elections, where McDonald also lost his safe Liberal seat, laid the foundations for the formation of the Land Conservation Council (LCC) later in 1971.

The LCC's main charter was to make recommendations on the "balanced use" of Victoria's public land.

When Bill Borthwick, Victoria's new Minister for Conservation, delivered his welcoming speech to the newly formed council members he advised them to make their recommendations... *"as if for a thousand years"*... And with that, he left them to it...

The LCC's processes proved independent and rigorous involving extensive community consultation and robust debate, which at the time was a unique formula.

Notably, 96% of the LCC's recommendations were accepted by successive State Governments over its successful period of operation to 1997.

These visionary deliberations ultimately led to a progressive expansion of Victoria's magnificent National Parks and Reserves.

For example, in 1956 when the first National Parks Legislation was enacted, only 13 Parks existed including the iconic Mt Buffalo and Wilsons Prom. But by 1975 when the first of the LCC's recommendations

were tabled that number had increased to 26 totalling over 226000 ha.

About one-third of Victoria, or about 7.1 million hectares, is publicly owned native forest. By 2013, about half (4M ha) was set aside as Parks and Conservation Reserves with the other half (3.1M ha) as State forest.

Brian Doolan's Thesis...

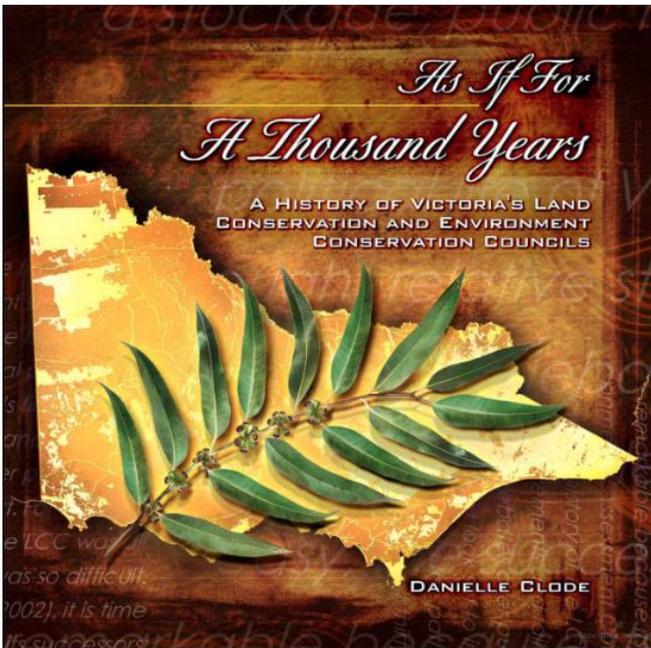
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ykRd9foKWnClndZW-3hpahjvR7Tn38V/view>

Sir William (Black Jack) McDonald

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcdonald-sir-william-john-black-jack-27610>



This is what the fuss was all about. A proposal in the late 1960s to clear remnant Mallee woodlands for agriculture.



"As if for a thousand years" The history of the Land Conservation Council in Victoria.



In 1956 when the first National Parks Legislation was proclaimed, only 13 Parks existed including the iconic Mt Buffalo and Wilsons Promontory. By 1975 when the first of the LCC's recommendations were tabled that number had increased to 26 totalling over 226000 ha. By 2013 nearly 3.9M ha were reserved. Source: VNPA