

## Cave Conservation at Mole Creek

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Humans and caves in the district have interacted since Aboriginal occupation. Restricted availability of karst waters dictated tribal movement, whereas firing regimes influenced some karst catchments.

The more detrimental effects of white man started in 1829. Pioneering activities removed the Aborigines. Logging, farming, and cave visitation began to adversely change the integrity of the karst. Humans still rely on the karst systems for their water supply, yet today the impacts have only escalated, and now also include mining and pollution. While authorities now recognise the values of the karst heritage; Governments, rather than moving to encourage the appreciation and preservation of the karst, are still promoting the destructive attitudes of pioneering days.

In response to escalation of unsustainable logging (85% goes to woodchips) and the threat of "Resource Security" MCCC members have been involved with the mounting of the Great Western Tiers National Park proposal and the associated campaign. The maintenance of the integrity of the remaining karst heritage and forest cover of the catchments are core foci and reasons of the campaign. It remains that the 85% of Australians opposed to woodchip logging are being passed over by successive Governments for NBH-Peko. The Tasmanian Forestry Commission has responded to the Great Western Tiers National Park proposal with a draft management plan to log over 83% of the available public forests of the Great Western Tiers in the next 10 years, including the western karst areas of the Tiers.

The next greatest threat to the Mole Creek karst is the combination of detrimental effects of private landowners. Much of the lower catchments are privately owned. Logging of the remaining private forests is continuing unabatedly. Destructive "traditional" mechanised farming practices, fouling of waters, toxic chemical usage may soon be enshrined in "Right to Farm" legislation, which will usurp third party rights of common law regarding rights to clean air, water and soil. It will mean karst will have even less protection. All the benefits of recent LANDCARE initiatives will be undone.

The Mole Creek limeworks has a remaining life of 6-20 years at the existing site depending on various circumstances. This NBH-Peko owned company is looking to next mine the internationally significant Dogs Head Hill karst.

The Mole Creek municipal tip is still sited on polygonal karst, and being operated in contravention of the (outdated) licence conditions. Many landowners are still dumping rubbish, carcasses etc into sinkholes. Stock are still being allowed free access to waterways by many landowners.

The Mole Creek Progress Association is publicising cave locations. Outdoor recreation and school groups are actively promoting caving as a sporting pursuit without addressing issues of ethics and conservation.

### References:

- D.Hunter 1992, A brief history of cave conservation at Mole Creek and the development of the Great Western Tiers National Park proposal, *Illuminations* 1, 9-14.
- M.Lichon 1992, "Right to Farm", the latest new threat to the Mole Creek karst, *Illuminations* 1, 15-16.
- M.Lichon 1992, Recent history & issues surrounding the saving of Exit Cave, and future options, *Illuminations* 1, 17-22.