

## Report to DAF RE World Parks Congress

27 November, 2014

Protect the Bush Alliance and The Bimblebox Alliance Inc. attended the World Parks Congress (WPC) in Sydney from 12-19 November where, thanks to the generous grant from the Dorothy Ann Foundation, they hosted a very popular exhibit booth, engaged a stream session (fancy term for 'spoke to a group of people sitting around in a circle), on the quality of governance of Protected Areas using the state and national government's permitting of the mining of Bimblebox Nature Refuge as a case study, presented an e-poster (<http://nbsapforum.net/#read-resource/1049>) and attended a wide variety of sessions and workshops.

Six of us took turns manning (or rather womaning) the booth. The registration fees for three of these, as well as their travel expenses, were generously paid for by DAF along with the outrageous booth fee.

I am embarrassed to say that the conference organizers were the worst I and the majority of the 6,000 delegates who attended the conference have ever encountered. The program was only available as an app or on the congress web site, which made things very difficult for those who were not techno savvy and/or those from third world countries who did not have access to smart phones, iPads or computers.

The Venue was the Sydney Olympic Park – a dandy venue for the Olympic Games but not a good conference one, unless you are a marathon runner with a GPS who is able to navigate their way to the room/hall in which one of 18 simultaneous events are being held. Upon arrival to your destination, you are more likely than not to discover a note on the door saying that the venue has been changed and is now being held at the other end of the park on the top level of the football stadium in the far room behind the bleachers.

While Tony Abbott was making an ass of himself at the G20, Minister for (haha) the Environment, Greg Hunt was shamelessly selling porkies at the WPC. At the opening ceremony the attendees were very impressed with his welcoming speech in which he took credit for the previous government's green credentials giving the impression that Australia was still a leader in all things environmental. By the end of the week, however, most of the wonderfully passionate and intelligent delegates took Hunt's promises with a pinch of salt and much sadness. Armed with a healthy amount of skepticism due to the fact that they have to defend their parks and reserves on a daily basis from encroaching government stupidity and industry greed, they discovered (with our help) that like most politicians, our Minister was full of globally warmed air.

You will be interested to learn, though undoubtedly not surprised, that the IUCN is in part funded by fossil fuel giants such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton, among others, including our personal favorite, Shell. There were over 200 delegates milling around the conference with name tags that did not display their affiliation. Word quickly got out about who they were.

They were also hosting, co-hosting and/or sponsoring large fancy exhibit areas with cushy seating areas and goodies called Conservation Finance (<http://www.slideshare.net/valeriefakir/conservation-financejourney-vf31oct2014>) and Business and Biodiversity (<http://www.icmm.com/page/108288/news-and-events/upcoming-events/articles/iucn-world-parks-congress>) brought to you by... drumroll... the International Council on Mining and Metals!

We learned that the structure of the IUCN consists of the Secretariat on the one hand and six commissions – education and communication, legal, species, protected areas, (run by volunteers) on the other. Needless to say, it's the commissions that do all the work and the Secretariat that does all the schmoozing nowadays it appears, mostly with the fossil fuel giants.

Being able to speak with so many fascinating people from all over the world, hear their (very similar) stories and share our ideas made the trip very worthwhile. Thanks to the reluctance of the owners to let a coal company on to their Nature Refuge, Bimblebox is the first publicly known case of an IUCN listed Protected Area slated to be destroyed in favor of what is planned to be the world's biggest coal mining precinct. This case garnered a lot of attention and despite our booth being carefully hidden in the back of beyond, we were the only booth that declared loud and clear 'no mining of our Protected Areas!'

A senior member of the IUCN Protected Areas commission met with Paola and Patricia to discuss what might be done to help IUCN Protected Areas Category VI – probably nothing – but it was worth a go. It was obviously embarrassing for the IUCN to admit it has no influence over a government not honoring the commitment to protect protected areas. Yeah, sounds redundant, doesn't it? The IUCN established the Protected Areas management classification categories which governments can choose to adopt when signing the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity but the IUCN has no powers to enforce those categories. But it could establish a rating system on how well those Protected Areas are being managed.

Bimblebox is the test case for another 100+ Nature refuges that could be mined for coal. We have discussed the possibility of having Patricia Julien, the previous Coordinator of the very pro-active Mackay Conservation Group, apply to be on the Protected Areas Commission then sending her to the 2016 IUCN Conservation Conference in Hawaii, which is estimated to attract 8,000-10,000 delegates, to continue hammering home the Bimblebox cause from a different angle i.e. presenting a motion for changes to IUCN Protected Areas Category VI to clarify what actions can take place, and state that development should not take place if it requires offsetting a Protected Area such as a Nature Refuge. All Nature Refuges in Queensland are Category VI.

The IUCN is also working on an Offsets Policy and Patricia attended a workshop at the Congress on that and will present a submission.

While we were aware of similar challenges faced by US and Canada landowners regarding coal and coal seam gas mining and pipeline construction, we learned that many governments in Africa and South America are also being coerced into accommodating the big fossil fuel extractors at the cost of losing agricultural land and conservation areas. We have learned that human rights and the rights for nature share the same seat in third world countries. The same mining companies in Australia that lobby our politicians and 'suggest' policies and legislation in their favor, in other countries engage private police to intimidate and in many cases destroy villages and shoot those that try to contest their business. (Oh, by the way, all is peachy keen in Russia. They had the most impressive display of the Congress including food and drink, including vodka at night, and constant entertainment.)

The future looks pretty grim. The problem is, we are all so busy trying to keep up with the damage being done in our immediate surroundings – staging protests, writing submissions,

mounting campaigns and raising funds to pay legal fees, it is not easy to find time to communicate with the rest of the world about how to address this situation on a global scale.

Despite the grim outlook, all of us are extremely grateful to DAF for allowing us to participate in this event. We all learned a lot, gained an entirely new tier of support for our cause and will endeavor to keep our movement growing via social media internationally. I have to grin when I think of Bimblebox Nature Refuge bumper stickers on cars in Benin, Pakistan, Kenya, Bolivia, Russia or Madagascar, among many others.

Since the WPC, two horrific events have taken place, the first is the Queensland State Premier announcing that we will fund the building of the railway for notorious Indian Adani mining company (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-17/rail-line-to-link-australias-biggest-mine-to-port/5896154>) and the second is the deregulation of local water usage by resources companies (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-25/qld-plan-to-let-miners-take-billions-of-litres-of-water/5916740>).