

## Geographical Society of NSW

Source: [www.geogsoc.org.au/site/index.cfm?display=279275](http://www.geogsoc.org.au/site/index.cfm?display=279275)

### Country racetracks predicted to disappear



Photograph: Race track facilities. Phil McManus,

The photograph shows all that might be left at some country racetracks to remind punters of local horse races

A new book looks at some of the serious challenges that might prove to be the end of the local racecourse. *The Global Horseracing Industry* draws on six years of research in Australia, the US, Canada and New Zealand.

Co-author, Associate Professor Phil McManus, says Australian thoroughbred breeding is shifting towards the production of 'sprinters' not 'stayers'.

He predicts multimillion dollar entertainment racing complexes and online gambling will mean rural race tracks will close and punters will watch and bet online on Australian-bred horses in overseas races rather than at home.



### Focus on Asia in education

This week, 13 honours students in human geography at the University of Sydney made presentations on the results of research carried out for honours theses this year. Nine topics were on

research carried out in Asia (four in India, three in Indonesia and one each in Laos and Bangladesh).

The topics varied widely, including resilience to flooding in Bangladesh and India, rural development in Laos and perceptions of people smuggling in Indonesia and Australia. All of these mini-projects involved short periods of field work (four to eight weeks) and intensive reading and background research.

Work like this contributes to the knowledge of the student, but also builds relationships with individuals and communities in the countries visited. Around this time of the year similar sessions have taken place in departments of Asian studies, geography and anthropology all over Australia.

After graduation some students will go into business, others into academia or journalism. Others may not actively become Asianists, but will be part of a wider public with understanding of and sympathy for our neighbours. Education on Asia and engagement with Asia is not just about business.

**Robert Fisher**

*Senior lecturer (human geography), University of Sydney*

Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/letters/learning-an-asian-tongue--its-too-hard-its-easy-8230-20121031-28kha.html>



Photograph: Professor Kevin Dunn on Sunrise, Channel 7 morning program

### Sydney Riots

Kevin Dunn has made significant contributions to the ongoing media debate surrounding the violent protests in Sydney in September.

As the lead researcher on the 12-year Challenging Racism research project, Professor

Dunn has established a strong media profile and has become the go-to expert for the media when reporting on issues relating to racism and community relations.

On Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> September, he featured in a page four story in *The Australian*. In the article, Professor Dunn reiterated an important message that those involved in the protests were radicals, “with views that are outside the mainstream” of Australia’s Islamic communities.

On the morning that the article in *The Australian* was published, his comments were mentioned on-air by Chris Smith on 2GB’s ‘Breakfast’ program. Professor Dunn was then asked to participate in an interview with Chris Smith which was broadcast live-to-air the following morning, on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September.

Professor Dunn’s media coverage continued the next morning, with another live interview on ABC 702 Sydney’s ‘Mornings’ program with Linda Mottram. This particular interview focused on the importance of anti-racism education in schools.

Refer to <http://au.tv.yahoo.com/sunrise/video/-/watch/29116242/racism-in-australia/>



*Professor Philip Hirsch (far left) meeting with local Laotians*

## Helping Laotians adapt to rapid change

Human geographers and international public health experts from the University of Sydney are collaborating on a project to help people in Laos adjust to large-scale environmental changes, with a research grant of \$1.4 million from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

Source: <http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=8926>

## A need for awareness of Pacific neighbours

**John Connell is professor of geography in the school of geosciences at the University of Sydney.**

Last month my Sydney University colleagues un-discovered Sandy Island in the south-western Pacific, in the course of their work to get a better understanding of our regional sea-bed. Their research vessel, the Southern Surveyor, sailed through where it was meant to be located, according to Google Earth and navigational charts dating to 1908. Another colleague, on leave in Mumbai, read about the vanished island halfway between Australia and New Caledonia, in his morning newspaper. News of the phantom island had gone viral. Nothing about the Pacific in recent years has attracted such national and global interest. The unreality of the Pacific dramatically triumphed over its reality.

The reason my geological colleagues were investigating the seabed was because it is so poorly explored. Mars and the moon are better known. The human landscape, too, is suffering the same fate. We simply know too little - and perhaps care too little - about this ever-changing and diverse region at our doorsteps. Sadly, the few news stories in recent months have almost exclusively focused on the latter-day “Pacific solution” utilising Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island and Nauru.



*Tom Price Iron Ore mine, WA*

## Mining vs. dining and room vs. boom

All those one letter differences are explained unemotionally in this article in the Sydney Morning Herald of 21 July, featuring Associate professor Bill Pritchard, economic geographer and food security expert from Sydney University.

Source: [www.smh.com.au/national/mining-boom-versus-dining-room-20120720-22fc1.html#ixzz21FbH2LsL](http://www.smh.com.au/national/mining-boom-versus-dining-room-20120720-22fc1.html#ixzz21FbH2LsL)



Each year I give geography students a blank map of the Pacific and ask them to identify the islands. Each year the responses get worse. Bali and Thailand they place incorrectly in the South Pacific. Our South Pacific neighbours, too have fallen off world geopolitical maps - not just Sandy Island.

The Pacific is changing dramatically. To our north Bougainville will have a referendum in a couple of years to determine if it will choose independence from PNG; New Caledonia will contemplate a similar question on independence from France.

New governments have recently been elected in PNG and Vanuatu. What might that mean for Australia? Such considerations are important given that Australia provides half of all aid to PNG and the Pacific Island countries (\$1.17 billion in 2012-13), in a region where China has recently become a significant donor. Poverty has become increasingly visible in the expanding urban areas of the Pacific - now housing about half the region's population, often in squatter settlements, where not long ago islanders were presumed to live in tranquil rural villages. Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions, straining and distorting health budgets. Stability, too, has posed problems in the Solomon Islands where Australian forces remain.

Just as mining is changing Australia so it is changing the face of the western Pacific. The massive ExxonMobil Hides liquefied natural gas project will come on line in the southern highlands of PNG next year. The future of Fiji remains uncertain - will democratic elections ever be held? Will Australia recognise the military government? Will it return to the Commonwealth? These are troubling questions for a country that houses the regional University of the South Pacific and many Pacific regional organisations. Its stability is crucial.

Meanwhile, smaller states face uncertain environmental futures. Tuvalu has long been regarded as the canary in the coalmine of climate change and sea level rises, but the rather larger Kiribati and the Marshall Islands face similar circumstances. Their more immediate problems

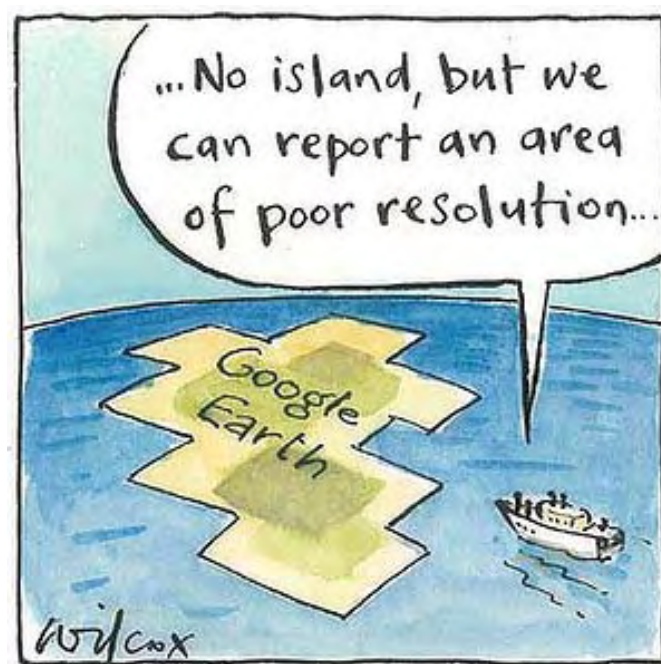


Illustration: Cathy Wilcox

are the fluctuations of El Nino/La Nina and their weak economies constrained by isolation and the limitations of idyllic yet unproductive atolls.

Migration has become one gradually more secure future for many islanders. More than half of all ethnic Samoans and Tongans live overseas. These migrants are anxious to participate in Australia's seasonal agricultural work programs, where workers come for up to seven months and return with a few thousand dollars - a massive boost to household economies. Two years ago on the tiny Vanuatu outer island of Aniwa I watched the World Cup, using a satellite dish that came from these earnings.

The single item that is sweeping through the Pacific and revolutionising change in the region is the mobile phone. Sixty per cent of islanders have access to one. Almost a million are Facebook users. In PNG in April social media brought together thousands of people for a political protest. Islanders have become more literate, more familiar with market prices and their social worlds have expanded.

We can be excused for not knowing about Sandy Island, but we need to rediscover the Pacific's real islands.

Source: December 10, 2012 <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/a-need-for-awareness-of-pacific-neighbours-20121209-2b3em.htm>

## Rural life is under fire in the Upper Hunter Valley

Linda Connor is a Professor of Anthropology and Phil McManus is an Associate Professor of Human Geography, both of the University of Sydney.

Farms, studs, vineyards and villages are being consumed by an occupying force of open-cut mines and coal-seam gas rigs.

The benefits of Australia's resources boom are far from rural residents' minds.

Their boom is the sound of overburden blasting as new coal seams are opened up in the black pits that encircle their properties.

Industry spokespersons claim that mining can coexist with agriculture because a tiny percentage of land is used for mines - as low as 0.7 per cent in the Hunter Valley.

The facts from recent Landsat calculations tell a different story, shown in the map, right.

Open cut mines occupy 16 per cent (315 square kilometres) of the upper Hunter Valley floor, and mining exploration leases take up another 64 per cent (1280 square kilometres), all close to farms, studs and vineyards.

Coal royalties contributed \$1.2 billion to the NSW government coffers in 2011.

Hunter Valley power stations provide almost half the electricity for NSW but 75 per cent of the region's coal is exported: 122 million tonnes went out of the Port of Newcastle in 2011.

How can there be coexistence with agriculture when the economic power and political influence of the occupier vastly outweighs that of the farmers?

Mining companies and lobby groups like the NSW Minerals Council claim that miners and farmers have a strong working relationship.

Their websites promote a few company-owned farms, dairies and horse-breeding establishments conspicuously located in the heart of mining zones.

But the majority of farmers try to make a living in the midst of 24 x 7 operations that create dust, noise and vibrations from blasting and machinery,

bright lights all night, damage to water sources, effluent, heavy traffic movements on local roads, loss of local flora and fauna, as well as disease and reduced productivity of crops and livestock.

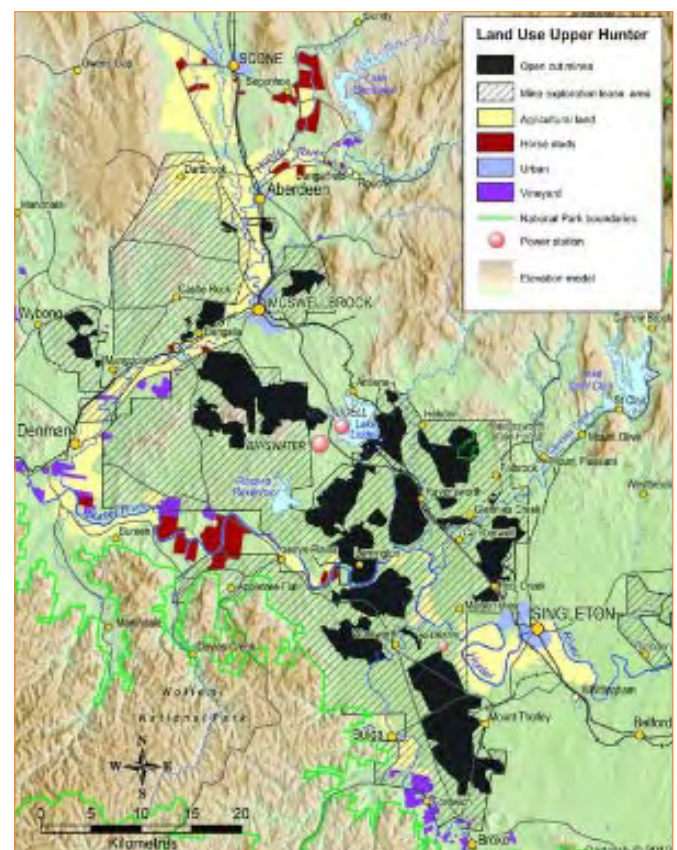
Coal seam gas (CSG) operations are a new type of invasion, with 35 exploration wells currently in the upper Hunter Valley.

Residents rightfully worry about pollution and the damage to water sources from hydraulic fracturing (fracking) that releases the gas, plus dangerous methane leaks, from coal seams.

Landholders lack legal rights to stop companies accessing their properties for exploration and extraction, while at the same time the landowner's key legal support, the NSW Environmental Defenders Office, is being eyed for termination.

The NSW Government's Strategic Regional Land Use Policy aims to protect high-value agricultural land from mining and CSG operations.

It has industry support but producers' groups like the NSW Farmers' Association and the Hunter Valley Water Users Association see it as a weak weapon to protect farming lands.



Map showing land use in the Upper Hunter





*Grazing land near Singleton in the Upper Hunter Valley NSW. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

All occupying forces give rise to resistance movements, and the Hunter region is no exception.

Normally conservative rural residents have organised themselves to campaign against mining expansion and CSG drilling.

These include Minewatch, the Hunter Valley Thoroughbred Breeders Association, and the winemakers' Hunter Valley Protection Alliance.

Lock the Gate Alliance, a national organisation that links more than 160 local groups to fight inappropriate mining and coal seam gas development, is strongly supported in the Hunter.

Local residents' groups have joined the ranks. This year, Fullerton Cove residents have blockaded the site of Dart Energy's coal seam gas project and challenged the company in the Land and Environment Court.

The Bulga Milbrodale Progress Association legally challenged Rio Tinto's expansion of the Mt Thorley-Warkworth operation.

Mine-surrounded Camberwell residents, while losing their battle against the expansion of Ashton Coal's pit, continue their fight against coal-mining dust through the Singleton Shire Healthy Environment Group, and their successful lobbying

for independent dust monitors in the Upper Hunter.

Mining and CSG industry supporters have little to say about these struggles, except that they always abide by regulations and conditions of consent; theirs is an essential industry creating new jobs and national wealth; and there are no cheap and efficient alternatives to coal in a world hungry for energy.

All these statements have been challenged, but they express the views of politically favoured interest groups and so often carry the day.

Apart from the mirage of "clean coal", climate change is ignored by the coal industry, and no wonder.

The International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook recently warned that with current mining technology, most of the world's coal reserves must be left in the ground if excessive global warming is to be avoided by 2050. The World Bank has endorsed this.

Meanwhile many rural residents of the Hunter Valley, unwilling to accept the irreparable damage caused by coal and gas mining, are fighting back: united, determined, a "Coalition of the Unwilling".

Source: Nov. 30, 2012, <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/1157436/opinion-farmers-residents-fight-back-over-coal/>