

Chapter 10

The Tasmanian Dam Case and the 'Green Commonwealth' Hypothesis

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1 Introduction

The *Tasmanian Dam Case*¹ was undoubtedly one of the most significant conservation victories in Australian history. The area then known as the Western Tasmanian Wilderness National Parks is a heritage wonder and, notwithstanding the Gordon Dam, the Gordon-Franklin river system is one of its jewels. When assessed for inclusion on the World Heritage List in 1981-82, the Parks met more listing criteria (seven of 10) than any other place in the world; a record it still holds (now jointly with China's Mt Taishan).² It is most well known for its natural heritage but its Indigenous heritage is equally remarkable, with the area holding extensive archaeological remains of a unique civilisation that was once the southernmost on Earth.

Under ordinary circumstances, the protection of such a region would be noteworthy. The *Tasmanian Dam Case* made it legendary. The story of how a burgeoning conservation movement managed to draw the eyes of the nation to a remote part of Tasmania and persuade the federal Labor party to promise to intervene to stop the construction of the dam if it won the 1983 election has been told elsewhere,³ as has the post-election drama of the *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983* (Cth) and *World*

1 *Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983) 158 CLR 1 (*Tasmanian Dam Case*).

2 S Smith and M Banks (eds), *Tasmanian Wilderness – World Heritage Values* (Royal Society of Tasmania, 1993); Department of Environment and Heritage, *Tasmanian Wilderness: Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982, extended in 1989* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004); Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania, *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area* (Tasmanian Government, 2003).

3 Doug Lowe, *The Price of Power: The Politics Behind the Tasmanian Dams Case* (Macmillan, 1984); Greg Buckman, *Tasmania's Wilderness Battles: A History* (Allen & Unwin, 2008).

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