

# Tara Foundation

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## Editorial

*In response to a proposal by Dublin City Council, first made in 2005, to extend its borders to the M50 ring road, Fingal County Council has voted unanimously to extend its boundaries to include the Phoenix Park, one of the largest enclosed parks in the world. The Park was formerly in the Dublin City Council catchment. This might appear to be no more than the outcome of a boundary war between two feuding municipal bodies, until one examines the relentless pattern of development that is encroaching on the park from all sides, particularly in the Liffey Valley and around Blanchardstown and Castleknock.*

*We have already drawn attention to the huge Phoenix Park Racecourse development, and the Racecourse railway station that Irish Rail obediently placed alongside, despite the absence of an existing railway line. We argued*

*that the location of this property developer's bonanza was no accident, that it forecasted attempts by city officials to rezone the park for development.*

*Fingal County Council has been very vocal on the subject of the park: in 2005, the Council voted to lobby the Office of Public Works to allow commuter buses to run through the park, though no arrangements have yet been made. Such a plan would require the removal of the park gates at Castleknock, even though these are part of the original park wall and are the subject of a preservation order. Yet one Fingal Councillor has gone a step further, proposing the construction of a 'light rail' system through the park.*

*The proposal to extend Fingal's planning area to incorporate the park seems expressly intended to facilitate commercial building within the park perimeter. Castleknock, which is also in the Fingal area, is currently a locus for large-scale residential and commercial development. The heavy use of the park as a through route for traffic, and the OPW's failure to prevent semi-permanent car-parking inside the park, seems designed to force the issue. Already, the OPW has made a planning application for a 250-vehicle car park beside Dublin Zoo, ostensibly as part of its traffic management plans. But there is more to come.*

*Australian construction firm Babcock and Brown is to construct a 22-court complex in the park, on a site at the conjunction of Parkgate St. and Infirmary Road, beside the Department of Defence buildings, which are themselves shortly to be vacated. The Private Finance Initiative project will see Babcock and Brown given a contract to design, build and maintain the complex for 25 years, at an initial cost to the State of €100 million, though given the nature of PFIs, this figure is certain to inflate. Though the complex will, allegedly, not be accessible from the park, the use of land within its boundary for a PFI of such a scale is a new departure for the State-funded construction industry.*

*None of those behind these initiatives refers to the fact that the Phoenix Park does not belong to Fingal County Council, and is not building land awaiting international construction corporations and their domestic affiliates. It is national property, and a National Historic Park. Its upkeep (by the OPW) is paid for by the public. Yet it is being annexed by political interests, and made the subject of planning applications where no development should be considered.*

*There can be no question about it: what could be a national asset is being turned over by political interests to the "private finance initiatives" who are their true constituents. It does not matter whether placing a light rail route through the park makes the slightest sense, or whether motorway schemes like the M50 and M3 will be of any use to those who have to pay for it. What is vital*

*is that the concept of national property, immune from appropriation by private interests, is made meaningless.*

## **Coillte: the mismanagement of Ireland's forests**

*Coillte Teoranta, the Irish Forestry Board, was formed in 1989 and "owns", or rather has custody over, 441,000 hectares, of which 350,000 are forested. Despite the fact that Ireland has perfect conditions for tree production, with broadleaf species growing faster than elsewhere on the continent, Coillte's policy is to plant sitka spruce, to the exclusion of other tree varieties. However, the wood from sitka spruce trees is the lowest quality wood commercially available, unsuitable for any purpose other than compaction into pallets.*

*The susceptibility of pine trees to insect infestation and disease, when compared to broadleaf, means that they require a higher rate of pesticide usage. Coillte have responded to pine weevil outbreaks by spraying chemicals containing high quantities of dioxins. Pollution of groundwater by fertilisers, and the acidification of soil by the trees themselves, are both problems which are created by this forest monoculture, not to speak of the year-round exclusion of natural light from the forest floor, which prevents the flourishing of undergrowth and of associated animal and insect species. What is astounding is that this scorched-earth approach to forestry is being applied across the board, not simply on peat lands or scrub.*

*The unspoken State policy seems to be twofold: to prevent the large-scale growing of native broadleaf trees, and to prevent the development of a strong native industry based on wood products. The State's notion of "competition" seems to be to eliminate any threat which domestic industry and fuels might present to imports. But it seems that the State plan is more ambitious than simply preventing the Irish people from benefiting from their own natural resources.*

*Coillte's role in "managing" the nation's forests has been put in the spotlight recently by issues surrounding the transfer, in 2001 and 2004, of a total of 400 acres of Coillte-managed land at Bellinaboy, Co. Mayo, to Shell, and the sale of part of the national monument at Rath Lugh, near the Hill of Tara, to the National Roads Authority, and the subsequent destruction of broadleaf trees there. Despite the fact that Coillte has been given Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) status by Britain's Soil Association, it has been consistent in its refusal to comply with any of the principles of sustainable forestry or the rights of local communities, principles which winners of FSC status are supposed to uphold.*

*In 2003, the European Court of Justice ruled against Coillte's claim to be paid €50 million of compensation grants, to which only farmers (using part of their land for forest cultivation) were entitled. The ruling stated that Coillte misrepresented itself as a "private-law legal entity", whereas they were in fact a "public entity wholly owned and controlled by the State". The pretence by Coillte that it is a private company has been echoed by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan.*

*Coillte has been falsely represented as a private company by the State for a very good reason: so as to pretend to have a legal title to lands it does not, in fact, own. The forests of Ireland belong to the people of Ireland: this position has been established in law. Coillte's statutory role is as a caretaker of the property of the people of Ireland. It has no legal entitlement to transfer the land in its care to private ownership, nor receive money in payment for it.*

*The consequence is that, in selling (or handing over) land at Bellinaboy to Shell, and in transferring land at Rath Lugh via Compulsory Purchase Order for the construction of the M3 Motorway, Coillte has acted illegally. Any contracts which it has signed to effect these transfers are, legally, null and void. In effect, a State body has been masquerading as a private company, for the purposes of (illegally) seizing publicly owned land and transferring it (also illegally) into private ownership.*

*Coillte, then, is a State body whose aim is, not to protect or promote the national forests, but to appropriate public land, render it unsuitable for growing trees which might be of any economic, social or environmental benefit, and handing over those lands for purposes which can be of no benefit to the people of Ireland, to whom these lands belong by right.*

## **Total War in Burma: Part 1**

*Ignoring democratically expressed calls for a moratorium on international investment in Burma, transnational oil companies Total (France) and Unocal (US) have chosen to invest in a regime with one of the most deplorable human rights and environmental records in the world. [1]*

*In 1948, Burma, a South East Asian country with 48 million multi-ethnic people, won independence from Britain after more than 60 years as a colony. A new constitution established a system of government based on a democratically elected parliament.*

*In 1962, a group of military officers, led by army chief-of-staff General Ne Win, staged a coup, and a military junta has, in one guise or another, ruled the country with ruthlessness and absolute impunity ever since.*

*The junta suspended the constitution and instituted authoritarian rule under the Revolutionary Council (RC). Government ministers and ethnic leaders were jailed and parliamentary democracy came to an abrupt end.*

*In 1988, Burma erupted into a series of demonstrations and strikes protesting the existing extreme political oppression and economic hardships. The government initially responded with arrests, detentions, and excessive force resulting in some deaths.*

*These demonstrations culminated in a massive rally on August 8 in which hundreds of thousands of people marched to demand a change in government. These peaceful demonstrations were violently crushed by army troops who fired relentlessly on the unarmed crowds in Rangoon and other cities killing more than ten thousand students, civilian and Buddhist monk protesters throughout the country. Afterwards, thousands more were arrested. [2]*

*On September 18, 1988, army chief-of-staff General Saw Maung staged another military coup which imposed martial law and transferred control of the country to the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1989, the SLORC changed the name of the country to Myanmar (and also changed the names of several cities) claiming that the new names were for the benefit of the minority, non-Burman segments of the population.*

*One of the more significant political parties, of over 200 that emerged in 1988 and 1989, was the [National League for Democracy \(NLD\)](#) led by the Burmese human rights activist [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi](#). She is the daughter of Burma's national hero, General Aung San. Alarmed by her popularity, the SLORC put her under house arrest in July 1989.*

*In the multi-party election held in May 1990, the NLD won a landslide victory, sweeping 392 of 485 parliamentary seats (or 80% of the seats) despite having a leader under house arrest and very little access to the media. However, the SLORC refused to transfer power to the NLD claiming that transfer of power to a civilian government could not take place until a new constitution is brought into effect — something that has yet to happen. [3]*

*Since the 1988 coup, the Burmese military have been engaged in a huge programme of forced population displacement.*

*In 1992, Pagan, the ancient capital of Burma, was emptied of its population of more than four thousand people, who were forcibly expelled by the Burmese military to make way for tourist facilities. The thatched shacks replacing their former houses, are made of straw and poor quality bamboo, and are located far away from the new dual carriageway built to ferry tourists to the new hotels and apartment complexes. Those who dared object to their removal were beaten, or arrested and disappeared.*

*The treatment of the population of Pagan was mild compared to that visited on the population of the current capital, Rangoon, where up to a million people have been forced from their homes. [4]*

*Throughout Burma, up to three million people have been forcibly displaced to so-called 'satellite zones,' where under the direct control of the military, the dreaded Tatmataw, they construct bridges, military camps, irrigation systems and oil and gas pipelines.*

*In these camps, 'porterage,' a colonial euphemism signifying forced menial labour, is enforced by the Burmese armed forces who have replaced the British imperial overseers of the past. [5], [6], [7]*

*The infamous Burmese railroad has been rebuilt and extended by this indentured labour. Every village along the railtrack had to give its labour 'voluntarily', regardless of age or state of health. If people protested that, as peasant farmers, their labour was all they had to keep them and their families alive, they were fined and their possessions confiscated. If an entire village objected, the head man was beaten or killed and all the houses razed.*

*"I saw one old man accidentally drop his load into the river," a former civil servant told me in a nearby safe area controlled by the Karen National Union. "As he tried to retrieve it, the soldiers shot him in the head. I could see the water turn red with his blood, then the river carried him away." A man who escaped with his wife told me: "I saw people dying because of landslides or fever. Some of the bodies were never found, only the head or a foot. They didn't bother to bury the bodies properly, with a funeral. They just dug a hole and left them there."*

*His wife, Min, said, "I feel for the children. They are too young to anticipate danger, so they are vulnerable. They are the ones who die first." I asked her if she knew why she was being forced to work in this way. "We were told nothing," she said. "We overheard we were building a railway so that a French oil company could run a pipeline through, and foreigners came to look over the site."*

*The oil company is Total, the French State oil Corporation, whose headquarters are located in Paris. Its businesses cover the entire oil and gas chain, from crude oil and natural gas exploration and production to power generation, transportation, refining, petroleum product marketing, and international crude oil and product trading. Total is also a large-scale chemicals manufacturer. It is one of the six oil "supermajors" in existence today. [8], [9]*

*The Yadana Gas Pipeline Project represents the single largest foreign investment project in Burma. [10]*

*In partnership with the American Unocal company, Total constructed a \$1 billion pipeline to carry offshore natural gas from the huge Yadana field lying off the Burmese coast. Natural gas deposits were first discovered offshore near Burma in the Andaman Sea in 1982. In the late 1980s, the Burmese government sought investors for a pipeline planned from the Yadana field across Burma to*

*Thailand. In 1991, the government reached a preliminary agreement, formalized later, to deliver gas to the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT). PTT signed a gas sales agreement, or GSA, with the Yadana consortium under which the Thai state gas company would be supplied with a daily contracted gas quantity of 525MMcf/d (million cubic feet of gas a day) under a take-or-pay regime—PTT had to pay for the gas whether it used it or not.*

*In fact, there are already major gas reserves in the Gulf of Thailand. When the GSA with the Yadana consortium was signed there had not been any exploration in the Joint Development Area that Thailand shares with Malaysia. Regardless, the PTT agreed to pay significantly more for the gas from Burma than it was paying for gas produced in Thailand (Burmese gas currently costs PTT about 18 percent more than Thai gas). [11] The gas pipeline runs undersea for 218 miles, and 41 miles across southern Burma's Tenasserim division to Thailand. This enormous plunder of Burmese resources would hardly be possible without the active collaboration of the Thai Government, and in particular the Thai military, who are actively policing the border with Burma. Thailand's Petroleum Authority will be the only importer and consumer of the Yadana gas. The deal is little different from the logging, mining and fishing concessions which the Thai military have negotiated with Burma since this process of 'development' in Thailand has virtually eliminated its own principal natural resources. [12], [13]*

*In 1992, Total agreed to develop the field with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). Unocal, a U.S. oil company, joined the venture in 1993. [14], [15]*

*In fact, the Yadana pipeline is simply part of an extensive network of oil and gas investments being constructed by Unocal across Southeast Asia: in Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, and Vietnam. [16], [17]*

*After extensive negotiations, the Yadana field consortium - known as the Moattama Gas Transportation Company - was formally incorporated in December 1994. In February 1995, Unocal signed a contract with SLORC to extract and transport natural gas using a pipeline from the Yadana Field located 43 miles off Burma's coast. The field is estimated to have six trillion cubic feet of gas with a market value of \$6.5 billion. Daily gas production levels are estimated at 650 million cubic feet. [18]*

*Moattama's stakeholders include Total (31.24%), Unocal (28.26%), PTT (25.5 %) and MOGE (15%). Unocal's current net share of payments to SLORC to gain the concession is about \$10 million.*

*According to Total Oil, since completion of the Yadana field, 15-20% of Thailand's gas demand is now provided by Burma.*

*The French corporation has also openly stated that the pipeline firmly integrates both Burma and Thailand together as part of a wider South-East Asian economic sphere. [19]*

*One part of the unspoken arrangement between Thailand and Burma in regard to the Yadana field deal is that the Thai military forcibly return Burmese refugees. Thailand's strategy is similar to that pursued in the 1980's with Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.*

*In April 1993, Thai troops burned down two refugee camps in an operation, reported the Bangkok Nation, 'probably related to the gas pipeline'. Thousands of ethnic Mon refugees have since been forced back into Burma, many straight into the hands of the SLORC military. On the border, where the pipeline enters Thailand, SLORC troops wore Total pens in their uniforms. 'Total is coming,' said one of them, with a broad smile. [20]*

*A second consortium consisting of Unocal, Mitsui of Japan and Total have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with SLORC to be the joint venture partners in the "Three-In One" project. This project consists of building an offshoot pipeline to Rangoon - connecting it to a power plant - and building a power plant and urea fertilizer plant near Rangoon. [21], [22]*

*Halliburton was also involved in the deal, working on the offshore portion of the pipeline. Halliburton had an office in Rangoon as early as 1990, two years after the military regime took power by cancelling the election victory of the National League for Democracy. In the early 1990's, Halliburton Energy Services joined with Alfred McAlpine (UK) to provide pre-commissioning services to the Yadana pipeline.*

*In 1997, after Dick Cheney joined Halliburton, the Yadana field developers hired European Marine Services (EMC) to lay the 365-kilometer offshore portion of the Yadana gas pipeline. EMC is a 50-50 joint venture between Halliburton and Saipem of Italy. From July to October 1997, EMC installed the 360-inch diameter line using its pipe-laying barges. [23]*

*The route followed by Halliburton and Saipem was chosen by the Burmese government to minimize costs, even though the onshore pipeline path would cut through areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in the Tenasserim region of Burma. Given the Burmese military's well-documented history of human rights violations and brutality, human rights groups state that the western companies knew or must have known that savage atrocities would accompany Burmese troops into the onshore pipeline region. They say there was ample evidence in the public domain that such violations were already occurring when Halliburton chose to lay pipe for the project. Katie Redford, a lawyer with EarthRights International stated:*

*"To be involved in the Yadana pipeline is to knowingly accept brutal violations of human rights as part of doing business." [24]*

*The gas pipeline travels through a variety of ecosystems including dense tropical forest, disrupting the habitat of rare animals such as tigers, rhinos and elephants. [25]*

*The pipeline area is inhabited by the Karen, Mon and Tavoy peoples who have partial control of the region. The operation resulted in forced village relocation,*



*the forced labor of tens of thousands of local inhabitants, and constant fatalities at the hands of the SLORC troops. As a result of these activities, the entire region is a war zone due to the ethnic peoples' need to defend themselves against SLORC attacks, making the region highly unstable. [26]*

*The US State Department stated that the SLORC 'routinely' uses slave labour and 'will use the new railways to transport soldiers and construction supplies into the pipeline area'. The oil companies denied the railway was linked to the pipeline project, and although most supplies are likely to arrive by sea, there can be no doubt that the railway allowed the generals to protect the companies' investment and their own cut from it. [27]*

*The SLORC has been routinely condemned by the US Congress and State Department, the European Parliament, the UN Human Rights Commission, the International Labor Organization, and Amnesty International. There can be no doubt that the SLORC has gained political legitimacy and continues to maintain financial solvency largely through its partnerships with foreign oil and gas corporations. [28]*

*In 1993, Total was contacted by officials of the Burmese Government in exile, representing Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy. They provided the company with extensive evidence of slave labour along the route of the pipeline. They also demonstrated how the profits from the project would invariably buy the arms and military equipment to which about half of the SLORC's budgetary spending is devoted, thus helping to underwrite the repression of the population. Total's response was it would 'continue'. UNOCAL has described reports of slave labour as 'fabrications'. [29]*

*Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of Burma's democracy movement, has repeatedly called on companies like TOTAL and Unocal to leave Burma. She has said that: "TOTAL has become the main supporter of the Burmese military regime." [30], [31]*

*It is clear that the French government is supporting Total, regardless of its publicly stated opposition to the military regime. In fact, the risk taken by Total for operating in Burma was underwritten in 1994 by France's State Export Credit Insurance Agency (COFACE). According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this position is not contradictory, since the construction of the pipeline would contribute to the "development" of the region. [32], [33], [34]*

*In August 2000, a U.S. federal district court concluded that the Yadana pipeline consortium "knew the military had a record of committing human rights abuses; that the Project hired the military to provide security for the project, a military that forced villagers to work and entire villages to relocate for the benefit of the Project; that the military, while forcing villagers to work and relocate, committed numerous acts of violence; and that Unocal knew or should*

*have known that the military did commit, was committing and would continue to commit these torturous acts." [35], [36]*

*In 2004, Oil giant Unocal settled out of court in two lawsuits filed in the United States by villagers in Myanmar who alleged the company benefited from human rights abuses they suffered during the construction of the Yadana gas pipeline.*

*The 15 unnamed villagers had sued Unocal in 1996, claiming the company should be held liable for murder, rape, torture, extortion, forced labor, and the forced relocation of whole villages perpetrated by the Myanmar military during construction of the \$1.2 billion pipeline. [37], [38], [39], [40], [41], [42]*

*The entire deal will give the military dictatorship about \$400 million a year over 30 years. [43]*

*Since the open suppression of democracy in 1990, it is estimated that the ruling SLORC have received 65% of their financial backing from foreign oil companies. [44], [45]*

**Part Two of this article can be found in the February Edition.**

**More information about the situation in Burma and Total Oil's involvement there can be found at: Students Against Total Oil - <http://totalitarian-oil.blogspot.com/>**

## **Footnotes**

[1]

[http://www.earthrights.org/site\\_blurbs/yadana\\_natural\\_gas\\_pipeline\\_project.html](http://www.earthrights.org/site_blurbs/yadana_natural_gas_pipeline_project.html)

[2] <http://www.burmawatch.org/aboutburma.html>

[3] Ibid.

[4] <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199605/msg00180.html>

[5] <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/world/story/0,,2042200,00.html>

[6] <http://mediafilter.org/caq/CAQ58burmese.html>

[7] <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199605/msg00180.html>

[8] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total\\_S.A.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_S.A.)

[9] <http://www.total.com/en/group/presentation>

[10]

[http://www.earthrights.org/site\\_blurbs/yadana\\_natural\\_gas\\_pipeline\\_project.html](http://www.earthrights.org/site_blurbs/yadana_natural_gas_pipeline_project.html)

[11] <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=4216&print=yes&c=e>

[12] <http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/boycott/oil/pipeline2.html>

[13] <http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=277>

[14] <http://www.foe.org/WSSD/unocal.html>

[15] [http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_01/01.14A.Zalmay.Oil.htm](http://www.truthout.org/docs_01/01.14A.Zalmay.Oil.htm)

[16] [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GG20Aeo3.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GG20Aeo3.html)

[17] [http://www.moles.org/ProjectUnderground/drillbits/5\\_17/1.html](http://www.moles.org/ProjectUnderground/drillbits/5_17/1.html)

[18] <http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/boycott/oil/pipeline2.html>

- [19] [http://burma.total.com/en/contexte/p\\_1\\_3.htm](http://burma.total.com/en/contexte/p_1_3.htm)
- [20] <http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=277>
- [21] <http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/boycott/oil/pipeline2.html>
- [22] [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil\\_watch/Cheney\\_Halliburton.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil_watch/Cheney_Halliburton.html)
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] Ibid.
- [25] [http://www.earthrights.org/site\\_blurbs/yadana\\_natural\\_gas\\_pipeline\\_project.html](http://www.earthrights.org/site_blurbs/yadana_natural_gas_pipeline_project.html)
- [26] <http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/boycott/oil/pipeline2.html>
- [27] <http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=277>
- [28] <http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/boycott/oil/pipeline2.html>
- [29] <http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=277>
- [30] <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/pm/weblog.php?id=P152>
- [31] <http://totalitarian-oil.blogspot.com/2006/03/total-oil-what-are-they-doing.html>
- [32] <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/36/Burma.html>
- [33] <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199807/msg00327.html>
- [34] <http://www.amrc.org.hk/4301.htm>
- [35] [http://www.sourcewatch.org/wiki.phtml?title=Unocal#Burma\\_.28Myanmar.29](http://www.sourcewatch.org/wiki.phtml?title=Unocal#Burma_.28Myanmar.29)
- [36] [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil\\_watch/Cheney\\_Halliburton.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil_watch/Cheney_Halliburton.html)
- [37] [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil\\_watch/Unocal\\_Lawsuit\\_Burma.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil_watch/Unocal_Lawsuit_Burma.html)
- [38] <http://www.ccr-ny.org/v2/reports/report.asp?ObjID=qTibXnoSKu&Content=558>
- [39] [http://www.ccr-ny.org/v2/legal/corporate\\_accountability/corporateArticle.asp?ObjID=lrRSFKnm&Content=45](http://www.ccr-ny.org/v2/legal/corporate_accountability/corporateArticle.asp?ObjID=lrRSFKnm&Content=45)
- [40] <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/dec2004/2004-12-17-02.asp>
- [41] <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/HRW/d9a1473313e528c807d8776711e8d2fo.htm>
- [42] <http://www.hri.ca/partners/cfob/Campaigns/OilGas/OilGasinvest.shtml>
- [43] <http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/1998/23/?print=yes>
- [44] <http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=280>
- [45] <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/burma601/additional.html>

## *The Liffey Valley*

*Ever since the M50 motorway was extended over the Liffey Valley at the Strawberry Beds by means of two viaducts, even though it is a designated Special Area of Conservation, it has been increasingly clear that the entire Liffey Valley has been designated as a construction zone. From the end of the Liffey Quays outside the City Centre to Chapelizod and toward Lucan, a series of large-scale commercial developments has disfigured this stretch of the Liffey, seemingly without any limit on height, density, obtrusiveness or even consistency of design with existing buildings; these factors might be considered central to planning considerations in such regions, but where Ireland is concerned, public policy appears oriented toward the rezoning of public land for office blocks and apartments.*

*A worrying development is South Dublin County Council's recommendation of a proposal by the Affordable Homes Partnership, of which the Council's Country Manager is a member, that development company Ballymore Properties be allowed to build 1600 housing units of up to three storeys at St. Edmundsbury, near Lucan Village. At the moment, the site in question is zoned for agricultural use, but having received endorsement by the Council, the proposal is to go forward for consideration by all 26 Councillors in South Dublin. This is despite the fact that the proposal contravenes the Council's County Development Plan.*

*Ballymore Properties have used as their trump card a proposal that 70 percent of the homes will be 'affordable' or 'social' housing. As part of the scheme, the rest of the land is being offered as parkland. But the area in which the development is being proposed is an ecologically important region, protected by SDCC's Special Amenity Area designation, and so this potentially damaging development should by rights have no place here. What is being proposed is nothing less than the death knell for the Liffey Valley. That it is part of a strategy to remove the Special Amenity Area protection is evident, given the manner in which it has received such prominent State backing and promotion.*

*But as we pointed out in our article on the Dublin Port Tunnel, the 'social housing' provision, devised by the Government to give the illusion that they were concerned about the lack of affordable housing their policies had created, is no more or less than a confidence trick. It is an illusion, to make it easier to force through controversial developments such as the high-rise apartment blocks in the Docklands and on the city side of the Liffey Valley, and the Kilmainham Tower. Developers have been given the option to pay off local authorities instead of fulfilling their 'social housing' provision, and, predictably, this get-out clause has been a great success, with a miniscule number of*

*affordable units being provided since it was introduced. There can be no question that this same option will be exercised if SDCC approves such a destructive scheme in the Liffey Valley.*

*The Affordable Homes Partnership is a statutory body, whose aim, its website states, is to act in partnership with private construction firms to facilitate the provision of social housing. But because the mandatory social housing requirement on developers was removed in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002, such a body has no effective role except to provide public relations for construction firms, under whose cover public land is handed over without restriction.*

*The role of County Councils in steamrolling destructive schemes, over the opposition of those most likely to be affected by them, has been extensively demonstrated: in Co. Mayo, where Government and State officials have acted on terms dictated by Shell; and at the Hill of Tara, where the principal reason for the road is to force unsustainable development. It would seem that the Liffey Valley is next in line for such treatment; the gesture of placing the M50 over it was a signal, even then, that nothing would be allowed to get in the way of this objective.*

## ***Bottom Trawling in Ireland and Alaska: Part 1***

### ***Bottom Trawling:***

*Bottom trawling is the practice of dragging large nets weighted with chains, roller or rock-hopper gear weighted nets across the seafloor to catch groundfish species such as rockfish, cod, and sole. Large metal plates and rubber wheels attached to these nets move along the bottom and crush nearly everything in their path. The available evidence indicates that deep-water life forms are very slow to recover from such damage, taking decades to hundreds of years to recover, and then only if trawling is not repeated. [1]*

*Bottom trawls are primarily "otter" trawls that have steel doors designed to drag along the seafloor, keeping the mouth of the net open. The doors are connected to the fishing vessel by long bridles. The spread between trawl doors can range from 330–650 feet.*

*A footrope forms the base of the net opening and it is often fixed with rolling disks and metal or rubber bobbins that enable the gear to bounce over the seafloor. An average flatfish bottom trawl vessel can catch approximately 15 tons of fish in a single haul.*

*Bottom trawling is practiced throughout the world, but the primary concern in this article will be the effects of Bottom Trawling on the Central and Western Gulf of Alaska, and the Western Atlantic coast of Ireland.*

*The US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) states, "Worldwide studies of the effects of bottom trawling have generally found that trawling reduces habitat complexity. These findings have been confirmed by studies conducted in Alaska. [2]*

*There is growing international recognition that a global moratorium on bottom trawling is a matter of urgent necessity. To date, a number of countries have taken limited measures to protect endangered coral reefs and fish stocks, and some fishing areas have been designated as protected zones. However, these measures are difficult to enforce without extensive fisheries protection resources, and in late 2006, measures to declare an international moratorium on bottom trawling were successfully defeated by a number of states. [3], [4]*

*If allowed to continue, the bottom trawlers of the high seas will irrevocably destroy vast numbers of deep sea species, before the majority of these have even been discovered. It is a similar process to the destruction of tropical rainforests and just as environmentally destructive. [5]*

*Bottom-trawling practices are perhaps most destructive upon cold water coral reefs, although this is usually not appreciated. In fact, most species of coral grow in cold water. For the purposes of this article, we will be discussing the impact of this most destructive of fishing practices upon coral species contributing to reef formation in less than 20 degrees C. (p.1. Advisory Committee on Ecosystems, Report of the Study Group on Mapping the Occurrence of Cold Water Corals. May 2002. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, (ICES)*

*There are some facts to be noted:*

- \* of the estimated 500,000 to 10 million species living in the deep sea, the majority have yet to be discovered.*
- \* Approximately 98% of the oceans species live in, on or just above the floor of the sea.*
- \* Seamounts are home to a breathtaking array of species, for example, over 850 species were found on seamounts in the Tasman and coral seas.*
- \* Because 15% or more of these species may be unique to that area – each unsampled seamount is a potential source of numerous undiscovered species.*
- \* Two-thirds of all known coral species live in waters that are deep, dark and cold – some living 3 miles deep and able to survive in 30 degrees F. Some cold-water corals are 5,000-8,500 years old or more and can rise up to 35 m high.*

- \* *Deep-sea corals, sponges, and other habitat-forming organisms provide protection from currents and predators, nurseries for young fish, and feeding, breeding, and spawning areas for hundreds of thousands of species.*
- \* *Commercially important deep-water fish and crustacean populations found in the high seas include crabs, shrimp, cod, Pacific Cod, orange roughy, armorhead, grenadier, jacks, snappers, porgies, sharks, groupers, rockfish, Akta mackerel and sablefish.*
- \* *Deep-sea species tend to be slow-growing, late maturing, and consequently low in reproductive capacity. Many deep-water fish species live 30 years or more, some, such as the orange roughy, can live up to 150 years.*
- \* *Because deep-sea species live in rarely disturbed environments and tend to be slow-growing, they are exceptionally prone to extinction.*
- \* *Deep-sea coral and sponge communities are largely untapped sources of natural products with enormous potential as pharmaceuticals, enzymes, pesticides, cosmetics, and other commercial products, for example:*
  - \* *Gorgonian corals produce antibiotics;*
  - \* *Compounds found in certain deep-sea sponges are potent immunosuppressive and anti-cancer agents;*
  - \* *Some coral species contain the pain-killing compounds known as pseudopterosians;*
  - \* *Seafans contain high concentrations of prostaglandins (compounds used to treat asthma and heart disease).*
  - \* *Ancient deep sea corals provide valuable records of climate conditions that may assist our understanding of global climate change.*

*(p.2. "A moratorium is fundamental" – Deep-Sea Conservation Coalition DSCC, April 2005). [6]*

***The effects of bottom trawling on seafloor habitat:***

*Habitat features such as coral gardens and reefs, sponges, rocky ledges and pinnacles comprise the living seafloor and provide critical refuges for juvenile fish and crab. They are valuable spawning and feeding grounds for adult fish. Any alteration of habitat features, particularly one as destructive as bottom trawling, can drastically reduce fish populations and biodiversity, and severely compromise ecosystem processes.*

A 2002 report, *Effects of Trawling and Dredging on Seafloor Habitat*, by the National Research Council of the United States stated that:

*\*Bottom trawling and dredging reduce habitat complexity.*

*\*Repeated trawling and dredging change seafloor communities.*

*\*Bottom trawling reduces the productivity of seafloor habitats.*

*\*Marine species that live in stable environments, such as deep-water corals and sponges, are generally more susceptible to damage.*

*The single pass of a bottom trawl can damage large amounts of coral, sponge and other habitat-forming marine life. This habitat damage can take decades or centuries to recover.*

*Seafloor structures such as rock formations, sea whip groves and coral and sponge gardens provide key habitat for a variety of bottom-dwelling fish and crab. Fish, especially juveniles, find shelter from deep sea currents and predators in complex habitats. Bottom trawls are known to damage and destroy these habitats, removing refuges and food, and threatening fish populations and other marine life.*

*The debate is not whether or not bottom trawls damage marine habitats, but rather how much impact a healthy ecosystem can sustain. [7]*

### **The Effects of Bottom Trawling in Alaska:**

*In Alaska in July 2002, scientists discovered deep-sea coral reefs in state waters off the Aleutians containing over one hundred species of coral and sponge, comparable in size and structure to tropical coral reefs. The Aleutian Islands marine ecosystem is an exceptional area of biological productivity and diversity in part because of its complex seafloor habitat. As a result of bottom trawling in these areas, critical fish habitat in Alaska state waters is currently being destroyed and will not recover for centuries if ever.*

*Major commercial species that use these habitats include Atka mackerel, Pacific cod, golden king crab, Pacific ocean perch, several other species of rockfish, walleye pollock, Greenland turbot, greenling, shrimp, and other flatfish, octopus, and shrimp.*

*Scientific studies of coral in Alaska have concluded that corals are important components of the deepwater ecosystem and removal of these slow-growing corals could cause long-term changes. (Krieger and Wing 2002).*

*A report issued by the National Academy of Sciences, titled "Effects of Bottom Trawling and Dredging on Seafloor Habitats," was released on March 19, 2002. The report says that bottom trawling is killing vast numbers of marine animals. Bottom trawling was the most destructive fishing gear type recorded and reported on coral and sponge in Alaska, effectively clearcutting large areas of*



*coral and sponge habitat. This gear type was responsible for 97% of the total reported bycatch of coral and sponge in Alaska. [8]*

*Bottom trawling in the "primary broodstock refuge" for Bristol Bay red king crab during the early 1980s drove the collapse of the population, and continued trawling in this area kept the population at low levels for the past 20 years.*

*Dense groves of sea whips around Kodiak Island that are closed to trawling have 33% more juvenile Tanner crab and an increased abundance of important prey species as compared to nearby areas open to trawling.*

*Every year, approximately 40 metric tonnes of coldwater corals were taken as bycatch by bottom trawlers in the North Pacific region. Corals provide habitat for adult and juvenile rockfish. [9]*

*The areas in Alaska most at risk of coral and sponge destruction were the waters surrounding the Aleutian archipelago, which had minimal protection from bottom fishing and at the same time, the greatest diversity and abundance of coral in Alaska (Heifetz 2000). Recent studies have shown that bottom fishing had a substantial impact on deep sea corals and sponges in Alaska. [10]*

*Scientific studies that have been undertaken indicate extensive and long-term damage:*

- \* On a research cruise to the Aleutians, NMFS scientists Bob Stone and Jon Heifetz discovered coral and sponge bioherms. These scientists witnessed heavily trawled areas devoid of corals and sponge and parts of the bioherms with large tracts of crushed corals and sponges (Stone and Heifetz, pers. comm. 2002; O'Harra 2002).*
- \* Krieger (2001) found that a 1990 research trawl in the Gulf of Alaska removed one ton of corals and left 27% of corals detached in its net path. 84% of detached corals remained in the net. No young corals had repopulated the damaged colonies after 7 years.*
- \* Heifetz (1999 in NPFMC) found that boulders were displaced, and large epifaunal invertebrates were removed or damaged by a single pass of a research trawl. Over 50% of the vase sponges and sea whips encountered by the gear were damaged. Of the 51 individual rockfish observed in the study, 39 were associated with *Primnoa*.*
- \* Freese et al. (1999) found that a single pass of a bottom trawl in the Gulf of Alaska removed or damaged 70% of vase sponges, 55% of sea whips, over 20% of brittle stars, and 13% of finger sponges.*
- \* In Seguam Pass in the Aleutian Islands, gorgonian corals, which 20 years ago were a major component of the bycatch of the Atka mackerel fishery, are now caught infrequently (NMFS 2001). This suggests that after years of bottom fishing, most of these habitat-forming species are gone.*
- \* McConnaughey et al. (2000) compared heavily fished to unfished seafloor in the eastern Bering Sea and concluded that long-lived, slow-growing taxa were*

*significantly more patchy in highly fished areas, suggesting a slow recovery process.*

- \* *High (1998) found in Southeast Alaska that longlines affect the sea floor by snagging objects in its path, including rocks and corals, breaking hard corals. When hooked fish try to escape, motion of the line was noted for distances of 50 feet or more on either side of the hooked fish. [11]*

*These facts strongly suggest that the effects of bottom trawling upon Alaskan waters have been extensive, and that prospects are poor for those sections of Alaskan waters subject to this most destructive of fishing practices.*

*Part Two of this article can be found in the **February** Edition.*

### **Footnotes**

[1] <http://oceans.greenpeace.org/en/our-oceans/bottom-trawling>

[2] <http://www.akmarine.org/ourwork/fact-trawl.shtml>

[3] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/4308156.stm>

[4] <http://oceans.greenpeace.org/en/the-expedition/news/bottom-trawling-eu>

[5] Ibid.

[6] <http://www.savethehighseas.org/>

[7] <http://www.akmarine.org/ourwork/fact-trawl.shtml>

[8] <http://www.alaskaoceans.net/facts/bottomtrawling.htm>

[9] <http://www.akmarine.org/ourwork/fact-trawl.shtml>

[10] <http://www.alaskaoceans.net/facts/bottomtrawling.htm>

[11] <http://www.alaskaoceans.net/facts/bottomtrawling.htm#research>