



Topic of Capricorn

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The official newsletter of the Capricorn Conservation Council

CCC is funded by the
Fitzroy Basin Association



Department of Environment & Heritage
GVEHO

Environmental Protection Agency
Conservation Grant

CCC Management Committee

President: Alison Jones
Vice-President: Ian Herbert
Treasurer: Stephen Heyer

Members: Mike Danaher
Graham Lightbody
Bruce Young
Bruce Zimmer

Coordinator: Janet Barrett

Coordinator's Message

Rain, rain and more rain! What a great start to 2010 and the new decade. Creeks have been flushed, lawns and gardens are green, and our spirits have lifted to match our rain gauges. And all this in what has been an El Niño period. With SOI readings embedded in negative digits since October, and current outlook at -8 (readings below 0 indicate the propensity for dry El Niño conditions), how can this be right?

It's true that Queensland is particularly vulnerable to the effects of El Niño but some climatologists believe that Central Queensland is inexplicably less so. Our summer thunderstorms and tropical build-up of heat and humidity are not related to El Niño. These have no reliance on the sea level pressure differences between Darwin and Tahiti that gauge SOI, or sea-surface temps in the Pacific Ocean.



So like everyone else, I'm hoping for some good follow-up rain, but this may be thwarted. The outlook from almost all ENSO forecast models is for warm-neutral readings. 'Warm' being continuation of El Niño and 'neutral' meaning a 50-50 chance or 'have a bet each way' – hardly encouraging stuff. The message being.... (yes, I'm getting to it!) is that water is precious, drought is terrible. El Niño and drought episodes are likely to be an increasing part of our lives with climate change. 2000-2009 has been the warmest decade on record. As a society we need to change our thinking and find ways to conserve water, or less we face a very bleak existence.

On that somewhat depressing but realistic note, I want to wish you all a happy, safe and prosperous 2010.

Janet



Coal Mining and the 'Old Mother Hupboard' syndrome

By Janet Barrett

In case Queensland farmers thought that the new vegetation management laws, an ETS, water pricing and allocations, regional unemployment and other social pressures weren't enough, coal and mineral exploration companies are now moving on to their land at an increasingly rapid rate.

It seems that the nursery rhyme about Old Mother Hupboard going to a bare cupboard to get her poor dog a bone, may in fact be a self-fulfilling prophecy about our future ability to produce food. And there's certainly enough symptoms and signs for it to be termed a syndrome.

In a decade where prime agricultural land is being stamped on, fenced off, drilled into, driven over, bulldozed down, and dug up by coal, gas and petroleum companies, the Old Mother Hupboard nursery rhyme is fast becoming an accurate description for the future state of our agricultural industry and our capacity to feed our growing population.

In November alone, 52 coal exploration permits were granted in Queensland, with 17 of those being in Central Queensland. There are at least 15 new coal mines in our region in the advanced stages of planning. Many of these will be on agricultural land that produces food and fibre for our state, nation and the world.



With the world's population increasing by about 100 million a year, 8 billion people will need feeding in the year 2020. Climate change will severely change the way food is produced and the Queensland Government needs to get serious about meeting this challenge. The first step is simple and unequivocal - start saying 'NO' to coal exploration and all new mines.

Aside from the obvious environmental impacts, there are substantial socio-economic impacts from mining operations particularly in small regional towns. For instance, the transient nature of the population, the gender imbalance, and the high cost of goods and services that reflect the inflated incomes paid to miners. Case studies conducted in Blackwater, Springsure and Rolleston have documented these problems and highlighted concerns about social cohesiveness. The government cannot be ignorant of them.

Of course the environmental impacts of mining are of epic proportion. Companies use the 'offset option' to destroy often hundreds of hectares of vegetation. Endangered regional ecosystems and remnant vegetation (in the case of brigalow, bluegrass, and semi-evergreen vine thicket communities) are frequently lost. By offsetting, companies can establish vegetation elsewhere but this does not replace localised loss, nor the habitats of dependent species. Habitat loss is the most serious threat that vulnerable species face and the main reason for decline in populations.

Coal mining will continue to dominate our landscape and future while our government condones it. The last thing we need, is to find that we have become Old Mother Hupboard, because by then it will be too late!



Great Keppel Island Rally

As I drove down to Rosslyn Bay to catch the boat over to the GKI Rally, I remember thinking that this was the first time I'd ever done anything like this. I didn't know what was ahead and felt very scared about actually standing up and being counted, but I knew that this cause was too important to just stand quietly by.

All my fears evaporated when I arrived on the island to find a wide variety of smiling people from all walks of life, of all ages and from different organisations, all coming together to speak with one voice against the development of Lot. 21.

People were carrying huge banners, wearing T shirts with great slogans. My friend Verity and I joined in and proudly carried CCC's banner high with a feeling that we belonged. There were smiles, laughter, people introducing themselves to each other and we felt that we *were* making a difference.

During the day I listened to speeches from many people, walked up to a lookout where I gazed out over an unspoilt island paradise and learned about new issues. I felt the cool breezes across my face and the sun on my back. I could hear the native birds as we walked through beautiful natural flora. In the Wreck Bar, I ate my sandwiches and listened to a great band and once again met new friends. I swam in the azure waters of Fisherman's Beach and thought how lucky I was to have this natural island to come to. After a truly wonderful day and as I was homeward bound on the boat, I looked back at Great Keppel Island and I knew I had done the right thing trying to protect this island paradise for our children and from reckless development.

Denise Dalton (CCC Member)



◀ Denise and Verity carry the CCC banner up to the Lookout.



▲ A message for Terry Agnew.



▲ People assemble for the rally.



▲ John talks about the Beach-stone Curlew and other vulnerable species.



▲ Lyndie addresses the crowd.



CCC's current campaigns

CCC continues to represent the environment and community on some very important issues.

CCC submits on multiple projects

CCC has made several EIS submissions on development projects in the CQ region in the last couple of months. (Submissions from community members and stakeholder groups are allowed under the various legislative Acts that assess development. They are an excellent way to have input on the environmental impact process).

Submissions included: three Curtis Island LNG Projects - GLNG (Santos), QCLNG (QGC) and APLNG (Origin/ConocoPhillips); two dredging projects in Gladstone Harbour; and Codrilla Coal Mine Project (Macarthur Coal) near Nebo.

LNG industry on Curtis Island: progress update

CCC has again met with three LNG companies for progress updates. Their consultants and staff continue to be approachable, willing to assist with enquiries, and open to suggestions about offsetting and environmental management issues. However this cooperation does not take away from the fact that the LNG industry and associated capital dredging works will have serious environmental impacts on marine and terrestrial ecosystems in Gladstone Harbour.

The Terms of Reference for a fourth LNG plant on Curtis Island, owned by Shell Australia, are currently being finalised, prior to the commencement of its EIS.

Carbon Forum in Gladstone

CCC representatives attended a Carbon Forum held in Gladstone. This was a chance for local businesses to hear how an Emissions Trading Scheme might impact their operations. Senator Penny Wong (Federal Minister for Climate Change) flew in and spoke for an hour on the challenges the government faced in implementing the scheme and on climate change in general. Her talk was generally well received by attendees, although the Coal Industry folk considered the industry would lose hundreds of jobs under an ETS.

Environmental Values – Fitzroy River Catchment

CCC is represented on the panel which is considering the environmental values and water quality objectives of the catchment. This process is being facilitated by FBA and DERM and informs the Fitzroy River Water Resource Plan review.

Tower Holdings' resort development on GKI

Tower's resort plans for Great Keppel Island were brought to an abrupt halt by Peter Garrett, Federal Minister for the Environment, on 30 October. Finding the project would have unacceptable impacts on marine and coastal environments of the Great Barrier Reef, the minister concluded that even if mitigation and control measures were adopted, damage could not possibly be avoided. CCC and its members celebrated this win for the environment! Tower Holdings are currently preparing a third proposal for development on GKI.

CCC lobbies government

CCC has lobbied government departments on a range of environmental issues in the past few months: coal mining, national parks, Great Keppel Island conservation values, the neglected state of Middle Island Underwater Observatory, and non-compliance issues of lessees on state-owned land. Similarly a number of media releases and WIN TV interviews were made relating to the above issues.

Nathan Dam

The tiny and endangered Boggomoss Snail successfully suspended project work on the Nathan Dam while attempts to relocate them were investigated. There is confusion over the current state of play – is it back on or not? CCC's Vice President, Ian Herbert, is part of the Nathan Dam Community Liaison Group and has his finger on the pulse. CCC continues to oppose its construction.

CCC's 2009 Un-environmental Awards

CCC's Vice President, Ian Herbert, recently delivered his annual Un-environmental Awards for 2009. These mock awards highlight projects/developers that significantly impact the environmental values of our region in a light-hearted way. 2009 winners were: Iwasaki ('Old-fashioned Red-Neck Bulldozing' Award), Tower Holdings ('Persistence with Ignorance' Award), Peter Garrett ('Environmental Champion' Award), Ralph Hillman from Australian Coal Association (ETS Scare-mongering' Award) and Anna Bligh ('Disservices to the Environment' Award for coal mining).



▲ 'Anna' made a surprise visit to receive her award.



Nathan Dam – yes, no, maybe, maybe not!



By Janet Barrett

Situated on the Dawson River near Taroom, the proposed Nathan Dam is intended to predominantly supply mines and development in the Surat Coal Basin – a further sign that the Queensland government is intent on pock-marking as much of the state as possible with coal mines.

The dam has had a chequered past. In 2003-04 the Queensland Conservation Council and World Wildlife Fund for Nature successfully challenged its construction in the Federal Court on the grounds that the downstream effects of irrigated agriculture (particularly chemical-thirsty cotton) would impact negatively on the Great Barrier Reef. QCC and WWF argued that the impacts of increased sediment, nutrient and pesticide pollution on this World Heritage Property had not been considered. Despite an ensuing appeal by the government, the Federal Court upheld the finding that ‘indirect impacts’ on a protected entity must be considered under the EPBC Act.

In 2008, the endangered species of Boggomoss Snail (*Adclarkia dawsonensis*) put the project on hold. The snail only inhabits an unusual type of elevated mound spring known as a boggomoss. These are sited among just two dry woodland communities near Taroom. First located in the 1990s by a local grazier Adam Clark, scientists from the Queensland Museum identified and named the snail species and determined its rarity; it is now listed as ‘critically endangered’ under the Commonwealth EPBC Act. Reduction in its numbers may have come about by a number of threats including: land clearing, fire, grazing, weeds, inundation, and drought.

It was first thought that only hundreds of the snail existed in their moist environments and that the dam would remove their habitat. Conservationists rejoiced that the dam’s construction appeared doomed. However, scientists have since found about 18,000 of the camaenid and in areas that will not be inundated by the dam. This news appears to have removed the construction hurdle.

However confusion still seems to reign over the construction of the Nathan Dam. Is it on or off? At the end of 2009, Sunwater appeared keen to proceed but there were rumours that government funds had been withdrawn. Whatever the current state of play, there is no doubt that water from Nathan Dam will be expensive. This may well eliminate many agricultural producers and potential ‘customers’ from buying and may in fact ultimately lead to its failure to proceed on economic grounds. Wandoan Coal Project is apparently no longer interested in supply either which is a significant sign that all might not be well with the dam.

So, Nathan Dam on the Dawson River? Yes, no, maybe, maybe not!



CCC Noticeboard

Svendsen's Beach - Great Keppel Island

Only 25 minutes from the mainland, but you could be in a new world! Come and join us and tread lightly on the planet at our quiet eco-retreat right on the beach on Great Keppel Island. Fantastic snorkelling, walking and swimming. Luxury tents for \$95 per couple per night, 3 night minimum. We'd love to show you why we love this place!

Phone **4938 3717**



<http://www.svendsensbeach.com/>

Members!
You are welcome to attend
CCC committee meetings
next meeting: **TBA**



Global CO2 level
387.27 ppm
(Dec 2009)

If you have an environmental project you would like publicised, or are looking for volunteers, send me an email with details. We have a large membership base and will get the word out. Email: ccc@cqnet.com.au



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New Membership / Membership Renewal

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non-wage earner \$5

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I would like to make an *additional* tax-deductible donation of \$.....

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