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The Capricorn Conservation Council has moved through it's 20th year since formation with a number of significant changes which are helping to set the stage for more effective action in the coming decades. Due to funding increases and a Job Start subsidy for the current Co-ordinator we have been able for the first time to offer full time employment. This has enabled more consistent interaction with the media, in meeting public enquires and educational requests, and in participation in government inquiries and assessment processes.

Funding inadequacies however remain a significant concern. A recent budget review suggests that more fundraising effort will be needed to avoid the necessity of eventually reducing employment hours. The completion of the three and a half year Landcare Project has also meant that funding is no longer available for the significant regional project work carried out in that area. Our involvement with Landcare has become more focussed with an emphasis on near urban and urban issues.

Environment Centre

The employment of Frances Herbert as full time co-ordinator has enabled the Environment Centre to become more fully functional in terms of meeting educational requests, responding to public inquiries and maintaining availability to the media. CCC has clearly moved past the time when we could operate on paid employment of less than 10 hours a week and a task for coming years will be to secure adequate funding for the key position of co-ordinator.

There is also a need to maintain and increase the volunteer component which has always been the backbone of the conservation movement and the outgoing executive is recommending initiatives in this areas to the new committee.

Land Care Resource Centre

With extensions of time the final funding for this three and a half year project was utilised by December. Recognising that there was likely to be a continued demand for information from the comprehensive Land Care library some commitment was made to bring the sorting and cataloguing of this up to date. It was decided also to incorporate the existing Conservation Council library material into the larger Land Care library as this would make easier the task of volunteers to answer the wide range of requests being received. Maria Boreham and Fay Lawrence put in many hours of work on this and Steve Heyer provided invaluable assistance with the computerising of records.

Lower Fitzroy River Catchment Committee

The most significant new initiative carried out in the final months of the land care project was assistance to the process of forming an interim committee aimed at setting up a Catchment Committee for the lower Fitzroy. A lot of public attention was gained at a workshop on the blue-green algae problems of the Fitzroy. The presence of significant levels of algae in the river at the time of the workshop ensured a good participation level from riparian landholders and from local authorities.

Urban Land Care

An increasing interest in urban land care initiatives has resulted in a number of informal meetings looking at weed control and restoration schemes of urban creeks in Rockhampton and bush land generally in Livingstone Shire. A number of members have already initiated tree planting schemes and the interest now is in getting wider participation, particularly from those residents living close to project areas.

Local Authority Elections

The local authority elections just completed provided an opportunity to survey the environmental understanding and commitments of the various teams running for election. The questionnaire was directly only to candidates in the City of Rockhampton, with groups on the Capricorn Coast targeting the Livingstone Shire candidates. Respondents generally put considerable effort into answering the wide ranging questionnaire submitted. Although some of the written commitments were quite good, responses delivered verbally at a subsequent forum organised by the Australian Democrats showed little understanding of the key issues.

Of particular concern is the apparent lack of concern regarding the Rockhampton refuse tip which is located on flood plain adjacent to a large mangrove area on the Fitzroy River. Both Gladstone and Rockhampton are clearly in for further public campaigns regarding refuse tips on and adjacent to, tidal areas.

While there appeared to be a universal commitment to improve quality of effluent discharged from treatment plants there was no real knowledge as to how this could be achieved. There is only a poor understanding about other urban issues such as uncontrolled stormwater run-off.

Shoalwater Bay

With the setting up by the Federal Environment Minister of a Commission of Inquiry into Shoalwater Bay, this became, once again, the prime focus of CCC and the local conservation movement. Preparation of submissions, attending field inspections, and attendance at the actual hearings was very time consuming. It has been pleasing to see a lot of new and detailed information emerge about this valuable area. Hopefully the release of the Inquiry report later this year will see a resolution of this saga which has required our involvement on many occasions over the past 20 years.

Mt. Etna

President, John McCabe, remains on the Advisory committee set up to examine rehabilitation options for Mt. Etna. While a rehabilitation plan has finally been agreed upon some doubts remain about the ability of Queensland Cement to follow that plan. In October 1993 the company ceased production of grey cement and reduced the workforce by about 60 people. The intention is to continue production of much smaller quantities of lime and Ivory cement.

Gladstone

The major new industry proposals appear to remain largely on the backburner although the sale of the Gladstone Power Station is an indication that the expansion of Boyne Aluminium Smelter will go ahead.

CCC provided comments at several stages of the Gladstone Industrial Land Use Plan which has resulted in a recommendation for the State Government to acquire the Aldoga Site.

We were involved also in the assessment of Facing Island and other sites around Port Curtis as possible options for the East Coast Armaments Depot (as alternatives to Jervis Bay, Pt. Wilson etc).

Oil Shale

As an advisory body on the Stuart Oil Shale Development comment was provided at several stages during the assessment process as well as media comment. Several meetings were held with the proponents.

Curtis Coast Study

After attending several of the public sessions of this regional coastline study and maintaining contact from time to time with the study team, CCC took the opportunity to sponsor a meeting in Rockhampton at which Don Arnold could present the findings of the study.

Coal Mines

CCC acted as an advisory body on a number of environmental studies for coal mines including Gordonstone West. We have taken part in some workshops and discussions on mine rehabilitation techniques and are please to see that more research is being undertaken in this field. However, there is still no clear indication that the big mining operations are addressing concerns relating to mine water discharges and other issues despite the new standards being set by the Minerals and Energy Department.

`National Parks

The perennial issue of a paucity of National Parks in Central Queensland remains a primary concern of the local conservation groups. The declaration of Rookwood National Park north west of Rockhampton adds significant plant communities to the National Park estate and the State Government must be congratulated for this initiative. Despite promises for the Berserker Ranges to become a national park (as an extension to the existing Mt. Archer Environmental Park) no action has resulted. The Minister for Mines is reluctant to allow mining exploration permits for a key area of this proposed NP to lapse and has granted further extensions for these permits.

There is still a promise of further brigalow national parks although the delays being experienced suggest that opposition is coming from various quarters.

The opportunity to secure nature conservation reservations has virtually been lost with the approval by the government of an integrated resort/residential development on Hummock Hill Island. One interesting feature which will be lost to this development is the only coastal fringing stand of poplar box in the country and the marine nursery areas of Colosseum Inlet. The proposed resort on Curtis Island also will be at the expense of areas proposed for national park status.

Emerald

CCC submitted an objection to the rezoning for residential purposes of the Rifle Range on the east bank of the Nogoa River. Discussions and a site inspection of the area with Emerald Shire Council and the local Landcare group has resulted in the accommodation of most interests in this important remnant area.

Legislative and Procedural Reviews

During the year CCC submitted comment on the Queensland Environment Protection legislation, Planning and Development discussion paper, and the Federal Environmental Impact Assessment process for the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and the Queensland Conservation Council staff provided useful background material for these review processes.

Membership

Throughout the year an extra focus has been placed on boosting and encouraging membership, more social functions have been arranged, and members asked to participate in all levels of CCC's activities. The newsletter has undergone a transformation and we are once more stocking a small but select merchandise range.

John McCabe - President