Capricorn Conservation Council
President's Report April 1996 - March 1997

The past year has seen the Capricorn Conservation Council settle into the new premises at 9 Fitzroy Street and gain improved presentation and efficiency in operations and services despite a space which can only be described as fully occupied (ie. cramped).

Staff and Volunteers

With only limited funding CCC operates effectively in many aspects of environmental work due to the commitment of staff, committee members and volunteers. During the year Heather Ciesiolka stepped down as Coordinator to take up full time work elsewhere and Susan Cunningham was appointed to the position. Susan has brought to the position her biological research skills and relevant degree together with useful contacts at Central Queensland University. Unfortunately funding limitations preclude CCC from offering full time employment to Coordinators, a situation which puts considerable pressure on the current worker to meet all the requirements of a multifaceted position combining administration, research, media and promotion, training and other skills. We are fortunate that volunteers (some of who put in many hours per week fill many of the gaps but there are a number of regular tasks which can only be effectively undertaken by a qualified person who is fully aware of the necessary procedures, contacts, and networks. The other disadvantage in limited staffing is that the organization has diminished ability to work effectively across the region with individuals and small groups involving in local environment issues but needing personal contact to engage effectively.

Sales and Displays

During the year the small retail sales area of the Environment Centre was scaled down as a result of an assessment which showed that there was little effective income from this venture. Some sales are still undertaken especially at special events. The removal of the sales area from the front of the shop has cleared the way for this space to be used more effectively for educational and promotional displays with these being changed regularly.

Education Services

Education requests continue to come in strongly to the centre and volunteers have been specifically coopted to answer requests and prepare information for educational purposes. There continues to be difficulty in responding to drop in requests for educational material due to the limited hours of employment for the Coordinator and the considerable outside commitments in meetings and contact with the various localities within the region where Council involvement is required. Responses to educational request received by phone and letter were largely dealt with by volunteers supervised by the Coordinator. While a number of visits to university, schools and excursions with school groups were undertaken it has been necessary to curtail staff input in this area to meet essential priorities of Environmental Centre management.

Capricorn Conservation Council continues to be represented on the North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre Advisory Committee and has been able to contribute usefully to the landscape management and planning processes for the centre.

Participation in Government and Community Committees

Representation on various reference group and committee processes remains at a high level.

Principal focus over the year has revolved around water issues with participation in Water Allocation Management Plan Community Advisory Committees, and Reference Groups for the Comet and Nathan Dam Proposals. There has been a significant degree of dissatisfaction with the processes set up by the Department of Natural Resources with respect to the mega dam proposals for the Fitzroy river catchment. As a result of this a decision was made to not participate in some of the bureaucratic committee processes in favour of devoting more time to community education

The major work for the Coordinator is focused around the periodic high workload on the Regional Assessment Panel for Landcare and Natural Heritage Trust applications and the Fitzroy River Catchment Coordinating Committee. It is difficult to participate in these as a part time worker with other key commitments but volunteers would be unable to commit the considerable time and expertise involved.

A Recovery Team for the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat was set up during the year and Coordinator, Susan Cunningham, was invited to serve as the conservation movement representative. With the small population at Epping Forest National Park looking increasingly insecure there is much to do with this species to avoid the fate of extinction. CCC is also represented on the Bridled Nail-tailed Wallaby Recovery Team.

Participation on local tree clearing guidelines committees for Capricorn, Callide, Emerald, Jericho and Belyando was continued into mid 1996 until the conservation movement withdrew from this process when developmental work on guidelines were corrupted by action from the State Tree Committee. CCC did continue to involve in these processes after withdrawal from the committees by commenting on all available draft guidelines for Central Queensland areas as well as many of those produced in other parts of Queensland.

CCC also represents the conservation movement on the State Flora Harvesting Committee and has maintained participation on the Mount Etna Mine Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, Livingstone Shire Remnant Vegetation Committee and the Lower Fitzroy River Catchment Care Committee.

Pat O'Brien acted as our representative on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority ethics committee review.

Impact Assessment and Review Processes

Water was the big issue for the year with assessment undertaken on upgrade proposals for Bingegang Weir, Bedford Weir, Paranui Weirs and Starlee and Nathan Dams. Members stepped outside CCC territory of interest by involving in assessments of Dunollie and Walla Weir proposals on the Burnett as well as the application to mine illmenite from the bed of the upper Burnett. Assessment of the Calliope R. Dam and Awoonga Dam third stage were also undertaken together with meetings with local interest groups and the Gladstone Area Water Board.

Further work was undertaken and meetings held on the Stuart Oil Shale proposal at Gladstone. Other industrial projects considered include the Terms of Reference for the Impact Assessment Study for a Nickel/ Cobalt plant, proposed Comalco alumina and expansion of Ticor operations at Gladstone.

Assessment and comment was also undertaken on:

- Fisheries Discussion Papers (particularly freshwater fishing)
- Surat Basin/ Dawson Valley Industrial proposals
- Fitzroy Catchment Coordinating Group discussion paper
- Shoalwater Bay Draft Strategic Plan and assessment of Tandem Thrust Guidelines
- Submission on Draft IUCN protection categories

Rural Nature Conservation

Capricorn Conservation Council has for many years supported the use of conservation agreements to secure long term protection of private lands. A significant area of the Stanwell Power Station landholdings was set aside as Nature Refuge with a public launch by the Minister for Minerals and Energy, Mr. Gilmore. Conservation zoning for the site was first suggested about 6 years ago when CCC members were involved in landscape restoration and training projects on the site. The Belgamba Nature Refuge was also finalised after considerable effort by members Ian and Cathy Herbert and local Department of Environment staff.. Belgamba covers a key area for landscape protection at the head of the Dee River and adds value to Boldercombe Reserve Resource Reserve and the potential to develop a Scenic Rim concept for the Dee and Razorback Ranges with a variety of conservation tenures.

Local Government and Planning

Subdivision proposals were evaluated for a proposed resort/residential developments in Broadsound Shire and proposed chances to zoning along Frenchmen's Creek in Rockhampton (where a half metre buffer to the Creek was under consideration.

The Livingstone Shire and Rockhampton City Council Open Space Planning and Strategic Planning processes were engaged in with effective contact with residents in a number of localities.

Involvement with the Rockhampton City Council Green Corridor program faltered when there was some disagreement over tree removal and machinery reshaping Moores Creek without environmental supervision. However some council staff are gaining skills in this area and there is some hope that processes of ecological management for urban natural areas can be implemented in the long term.

National Parks and Conservation Areas.

The future of an expanded Byfield National Park looks brighter with clear assurances from the Premier Mr., Borbidge and the commencement of a plan for establishment of visitor facilities and management from the area. There are still a number of destructive recreational uses in the area with damage to dune features and to seabird roosts along Nine Mile Beach. Capricorn Conservation Council made representations on various matters relating to the future of Byfield during the year.

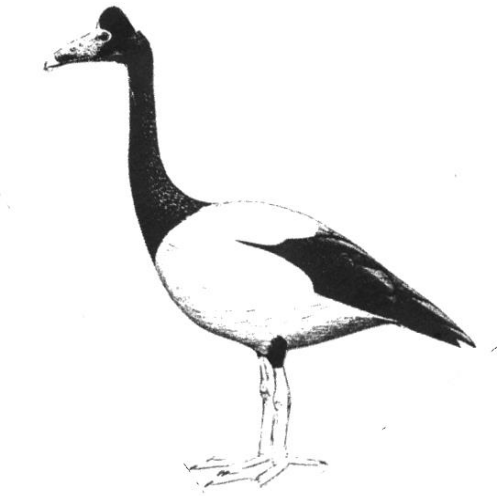
Special Project

A National Estate funded study: *Waterbirds and Wetlands Habitats of the Lower Fitzroy River* commenced in 1994was completed and launched with the assistance of Imogen Zethoven,

Queensland Conservation Council Co-ordinator. The study was presented to local authorities, Environment Australia, Department of Environment and wetland agencies and has assisted with assessments which lead to three areas along the lower Fitzroy being placed on the listing of Wetlands of National Importance.

In concluding this report I acknowledge the assistance of funding provided by Environment Australia under the GVCO Program and the funding from Department of Environment, Queensland

John McCabe



President

May 1997