President's Report to the 2004 Annual General Meeting

"The Hut", Haigh Park, Livermore Street, Rockhampton

Sunday 27 June 2004

Introduction – The Year in Perspective

This past year has been a busy one for the Capricorn Conservation Council, its Management Committee and its Coordinator. When I accepted the position of honorary president at last year's AGM, I did so with some misgivings as to the amount of work involved. And 12 months later, my expectations that it would keep me busy have certainly been fulfilled. However, meeting in some small way the challenges of this role generates a real sense of satisfaction. It has been highly rewarding to work with the dedicated members of CCC's Management Committee and with our energetic new Coordinator Stacey Robinson. Although there's always more to do than time permits, being able to work toward an environmentally better future has for me, proven to be its own reward.

The Management Committee dealt with a range of issues and challenges this past year – and this report offers an overview. The Committee has continued to hold monthly formal meetings (third Wednesday evening each month), complemented by informal working group meetings most other Wednesday evenings. But these represent only a fraction of the work volunteered by individual committee members and other active members in their own time.

Special thanks are owed to the two busiest members of the Committee - our Honorary Secretary Christine Fraser and our Honorary Treasurer Jeanie Heaslop. Thanks are also offered to Kris Palmer who took on the role of CCC Vice President following Erin Cameron's resignation and departure to start a new job in Ballarat, Victoria. Unfortunately, other commitments have recently required Kris to resign from the Committee. Andrew Baldwin has accepted the position of Vice President until the AGM and Chantelle James was co-opted to fill the committee vacancy resulting from Kris' departure.

Shortly before the 2003 AGM, our Coordinator Brett Kuskopf announced his impending resignation. We encountered a temporary set back in August when, after a lengthy selection process our new Coordinator left to accept another (more highly paid) position a few weeks later. Brett agreed to stay on as Coordinator throughout August - September whilst we re-advertised the position. A further selection process resulted in the appointment of Stacey Robinson. Stacey started work early in October 2003 – working initially with Brett over a few weeks' transition period, but soon in her own right. Stacey has proven herself an energetic and committed worker and a strong environmental advocate for CCC.

Brett and Erin are now located in Ballarat, and thanks are offered to them both for their many contributions to CCC.

Thanks also to editors Kris Palmer and Geoffrey Smith for producing several editions of our newsletter, the Tropic of Capricorn, during 2003. Unfortunately, the newsletter has languished during 2004 - volunteers for the vacant position of newsletter editor will be heartily welcomed.

CCC's membership, whilst still relatively small, has increased over the past year and now stands at more than 50 financial members. Our challenge for the 2004-05 year is to further increase this level of membership.

Major Campaigns and Projects

Alton Downs Feedlot Proposal

During the latter half of 2003, CCC continued to actively support the Alton Downs Ratepayers Association and other concerned residents of Fitzroy Shire against the proposal to establish a feedlot in an environmentally sensitive and inappropriate location a few kilometres west of Rockhampton. CCC sent a formal submission to Fitzroy Shire Council objecting to the feedlot proposal on a number of environmental grounds. Relentless campaigning by the local action group led by Ron King and Christine Ward, with continuing CCC support provided by Brett and then by Stacey, raised awareness of the environmental impacts of the proposal and contributed to the December 2004 decision by Shire Council to reject the application – an environmentally sound outcome.

After a much-needed break over Christmas, we started off the new year with a "welcome back" BBQ for members and friends at "The Hut" on Sunday 1st February – before returning to ongoing campaigns, projects and activities.

Waterpark and Sandy Creeks, Byfield

Over the past year, the environmental impact issues relating to harvesting of water from Waterpark and Sandy Creeks have loomed increasingly large as a major focus of attention for CCC. These issues have arisen from the proposal to Livingstone Shire Council (LSC) to build a weir on Sandy Creek and harvest water from this hitherto untouched rainforest stream - and concerns that LSC's recent extraction of so much water from Waterpark Creek that environmental flows downstream from the existing weir were not being maintained (on some occasions, there was no flow at all below the weir).

CCC has been working in conjunction with concerned members of the Byfield and Capricorn Coast communities who have been campaigning actively to protect the unique and valuable Waterpark Creek ecosystem from further environmental damage. This has involved a multi-faceted set of initiatives. Some key actions CCC has taken to date are outlined below.

Submission to DNRME
In November 2003, CCC submitted its formal objections to the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy in response to its call for public comment on the LSC proposal. Our submission emphasised the need for an environmental impact assessment before making any decision on whether to approval the proposal. A follow up letter to DNRME early in 2004 produced an assurance that CCC would be consulted before a decision was taken.

Community Meetings
To raise community awareness of the environmental issues involved, CCC hosted a well attended community meeting in Yeppoon on 24 November 2003. Although not organised by CCC, another community meeting was held on 18 March and attracted participation from a number of candidates for office in the approaching local government election. A further meeting was hosted by CCC on 10 June; actions arising from this meeting are now underway.

"Wild Rivers" Recommendation
In February, CCC submitted a recommendation to Premier Beattie to include the WaterPark Creek system on the list of nominated "Wild Rivers", with a view to achieving protection from further environmental damage. (Recommendation acknowledged by Premier's office.)

Deputation to Minister
On 6 March, a CCC deputation met with the Hon John Mickel, State Minister for the Environment, to express our concerns over the environmental damage which would result

from excessive extraction from the Waterpark Creek system. The Minister undertook to investigate our concerns and raise them with LSC.

Triggering the EPBC Act
In March, CCC wrote to the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment – the Hon. Dr David Kemp, asking him to require LSC to seek Ministerial approval in compliance with the provisions of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, before taking any action affecting Sandy Creek and the environment downstream. (Request acknowledged and CCC is following up further.)

Communication with LSC
In December, CCC wrote to Livingstone Shire Council comprehensively outlining our concerns about environmental damage to the Waterpark Creek system, and offering suggestions for improved environmental outcomes. CCC wrote again to LSC in February and received a belated invitation from the Mayor, Cr Bill Ludwig, to meet with LSC. This meeting took place on 21 April and 10 members of CCC met with the Mayor, other LSC Councillors and officers. Although much of it was devoted to presentations by LSC on their initiatives in limiting water consumption, the meeting enabled CCC to outline its concerns about the threats to the Waterpark ecosystem including the adjacent Ramsar wetlands/ listed migratory waterbird habitat and Corio Bay fish nursery.

Community Reference Panel
An outcome of the meeting was the invitation for CCC to join the Community Reference Panel established to advise LSC on the environmental issues involved in water extraction from the Waterpark Creek system. CCC has attended meetings of this panel on 12 May and 9 June (the next meeting is scheduled for 30 June), and recently provided feedback to LSC on the crucial need for further and more focused environmental studies.

Land Clearing and Vegetation Management Issues

The threats to biodiversity and other environmental issues posed by continued broad acre land clearing across Central Queensland have continued to be a major concern of CCC.

CCC continued to support the consultative process of developing regional Vegetation Management Plans despite unease that many of these plans appeared to offer inadequate protection to native vegetation. The whole issue of broad acre land clearing across the State presented a frustrating and confused situation over the latter half of 2003, given the apparent lack of progress that followed the joint announcement by Premier Beattie and the Prime Minister of a moratorium on further land clearing approvals and a proposed recovery package including compensation to rural landholders.

CCC wrote to both the Premier and Prime Minister, encouraging them to implement the package and introduce the proposed vegetation management legislation. Following Premier Beattie's announcement of his plans to introduce relevant State legislation in 2004 despite the lack of progress in negotiations between the Commonwealth and rural lobby groups, CCC wrote again to the Premier encouraging this course of action. The subsequent passage of the new legislation is a major step in the right direction.

Bush friendly Beef Seminar
CCC hosted a seminar entitled "Can Queensland Beef be Bush-friendly - Balancing the needs of pastoral production and biodiversity conservation", held at the Hut on 1st December. The seminar followed up the activities promoting awareness of environmental impacts of the beef industry at the international **Beef 2003** conference in Rockhampton during April. Initially proposed for mid year but postponed due to her other commitments, this event was organised by QCC rural liaison officer Nicky Hungerford with assistance from Arlene Buchan of ACF

and CCC coordinator Stacey Robinson. The success of the seminar was evidenced by it attracting some 70 diverse participants drawn from the ranks of graziers and other beef industry representatives, public sector officers and researchers concerned with the beef industry, and conservation representatives.

Application for Community Support Grant under National Landcare Program (NLP)
CCC has submitted an application for a major project involving collaboration with EPA and community stakeholders, which proposes to follow up the issues raised at the Bush Friendly Beef seminar. The project will explore multi-faceted investigations aimed at achieving a balance between pastoral production and biodiversity conservation. Applications for these grants from the CQ region are being coordinated and submitted by the Fitzroy Basin Association, and if our application is successful, it will support the aims of the Central Queensland Strategy for Sustainability 2 - recently developed by FBA (refer to next section).

Planning for Natural Resources Management – Fitzroy Basin Association

Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) has provided an $8000 grant to CCC to facilitate capacity building within the environmental conservation sector so as to achieve a stronger input of environmental views into the consultative planning processes for natural resource management across the region. A formal contract agreement between FBA and CCC was signed in August 2003, enabling the grant to be allocated to CCC. Consistent with this contract, CCC has been contributing to the FBA planning process through:

- participation in the community based, target-setting workshops, contributing an input of views from an environmental perspective to assist development of natural resources management (NRM) plans for the sub-regional catchments within the Fitzroy Basin;
- reviewing and offering comments, in November, on the draft NRM plans for the Dawson Valley, Central Highlands, and Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments sub-regions;
- reviewing the draft Central Queensland Strategy for Sustainability 2 (CQSS2), the integrated natural resources management and planning document for the Fitzroy basin region prepared by FBA with diverse community stakeholder input - and submitting in January, a comprehensive set of comments to assist its finalisation.

Cathy Herbert has continued to represent CCC and the environmental sector on both the FBA Stakeholders Council and the FBA (Interim) Management board, regularly participating in their meetings and liaising closely with our Coordinator and Management Committee.

Stacy Robinson (CCC Coordinator) also attends meetings of the FBA management committee, providing advice as needed on environmental issues.

Jenny Craigen has served as the community based environmental sector representative on the Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments (FRCC) Committee. Jenny's recent resignation for family reasons creates the need to find a replacement representative in the near future.

In addition, CCC has maintained a continuing involvement in the ongoing implementation of regional water management across the Fitzroy Basin through the Resources Operations Plan (ROP) process, participating as far as possible in the ROP meetings and contributing an environmental perspective.

Regional Planning - CQ a New Millennium

CQ a New Millennium, the State-government funded, region-based organisation established under the Integrated Planning Act to prepare and implement a framework for coordinated regional development within Central Queensland, has provided CCC with a $7,000 grant to support development of capacity within the environmental sector to participate in and contribute to the regional planning consultative process. CCC's coordinator is the environmental sector representative on the CQaNM Regional Coordination Steering Committee.

Other Grants and Funding

The capacity building grants from FBA and CQaNM have been welcome additions to CCC's operating resources. In combination with our annual government grants and special project grants (the major ones are detailed below), they have provided CCC with the resources to undertake a more active role than was possible previously.

Annual Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Grant
In January, $17,600 was received from the Environmental Protection Agency (Qld) as our main funding grant for the 2004 year.

Annual GVEHO Grant
In May, $4,000 was received from the Commonwealth Dept of Environment and Heritage (unfortunately a smaller grant than in the previous year – reflecting that Department's disconcerting po1icy move to reduce funding to regional and community environmental groups).

Envirofund Project Grant
CCC succeeded in its application to the Australian Government Envirofund for a $14,000 project grant to support further revegetation of Sydney Gully (North Rockhampton) and in association with this, to conduct training for community volunteers in riparian habitat assessment and monitoring both at Sydney Gully and on a rural property near The Caves (Livingstone Shire). This project will commence in the near future.

Note: The conditions of accepting a number of our grants have required CCC to increase its public liability insurance cover to $10 million. CCC has also changed its bank accounts from the Bank of Queensland to the Pioneer Permanent Building Society in order to streamline its banking procedures and reduce fees and charges.

Public Donations Fund
CCC's Public Donations Fund has recently become a focus of attention and there is a need to increase the Fund's profile, actively seek donations that can be directed to environmental projects and campaigns, and re-convene the committee responsible for its administration.

Other submissions and comment to various organisations/reviews

CCC has continued to prepare a range of submissions in response to calls for comment on environmental issues. An indicative rather than exhaustive list includes the following.

August 2003: Submission to GBRMPA on the Draft Zoning Plan for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, supporting the proposed green zones outlined in the Representative Areas Program (RAP)

January 2004: Request submitted to the American investment firm, Zipf Bros Investments, recommending that it withdraw its financial support for the continued development of the Stuart Oil Shale Project (Gladstone area) in view of the adverse environmental impacts. (This submission proved unsuccessful.)

February 2004: Request submitted to Department of State Development expressing interest in ascertaining environmental impacts of proposed industrial developments within the region signalled in the Fitzroy Industry & Infrastructure Study. (Request acknowledged with assurance that CCC would be consulted in due course.)

January 2004: Submission to LSC in support of proposed local law amendments to protect remnant native vegetation from clearing for urban development.

February 2004: Comments submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency on the draft Queensland Biodiversity Policy Framework, supporting the framework and offering suggestions for its effective implementation.

March 2004: Comments submitted to consultants GHD as input to development of a management plan for the Ross and Fig Tree Creeks precinct, Yeppoon.

June 2004: comments submitted to EPA on the draft terms of reference for the EIS for the Lake Lindsay coal mining project. (Mid-2003: informal comment on the Curragh North coal mining project)

Other Projects

Sydney Gully revegetation

The Sydney Gully revegetation project (North Rockhampton), originally undertaken with Landcare funding in conjunction with Greening Australia, was re-activated in the latter half of 2003 with tree planting activities held on 27 July (National Tree Day) and again in November, involving both CCC members and local residents. The receipt of our Envirofund grant will enable the expansion and further development of this project.

Duckpond Environmental Reserve

A few active CCC members have continued to contribute time and energy to the progressive rehabilitation of the Duckpond Environmental Reserve. This reserve, just south of Rockhampton, is under the joint trusteeship of the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, the Fitzroy Shire Council, and the Capricorn Branch of WPSQ. A number of CCC members and friends volunteered their efforts for a working bee there on 14 July.

Water Bird Survey

In October 2003, CCC members participated with QPWS and Wetlands International in an extensive census of waterbirds covering the Capricorn Coast, Hedlow, and Fitzroy Floodplain and Delta wetlands. The study involved over 20 volunteers and recorded over 30,000 waterbirds and waders on 60 water bodies. The records, which follow on from a parallel study conducted by CCC in 1994,confirm the nationally important ranking give to these wetlands. One highlight of the study was CCC Treasurer, Jeanie Heaslop, reporting on "*two balls of fluff*" moving along a drying bank at Rossmoya. This turned out to be the first Central Queensland coast record of breeding Red-kneed dotterel.

World Environment Day Display

On World Environment Day, (5 June), CCC participated in the program of community awareness activities held at Beaman Park, Yeppoon. The CCC "booth" displayed a range of posters and brochures and featured a scale model of the threats that water harvesting posed to the Waterpark Creek- Corio Bay ecosystem.

The CCC Hut as a community resource

As in previous years, the CCC Hut continues to serve as a venue for a number of community group activities and events. Instances included the following.

- The Hut served as a HQ for conduct of the Central Queensland Water bird census coordinated by QPWS and Wetlands International over 11-19 October 2003, with an information exchange/ workshop session held at the Hut the evening of 14 October
- The local Capricorn Branch of Birds Australia used the Hut for a workshop drawing together local ornithological knowledge for development of an Australia wide report to Birdlife International which is compiling a global inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The draft inventory of sites compiled by Alan Briggs following this meeting includes the Swain Reefs, and Capricorn Bunker Group of Islands, Shoalwater Bay, Fitzroy Floodplain and Delta wetlands, Carnarvon Ranges, and areas in the Diamantina-Georgina systems in the far west. CCC has actively lobbied for the protection or improved management of most of these areas in the past decades.

For acceptance by the AGM.

Bruce Zimmer
On behalf of the CCC Management Committee
24 June 2004