Capricorn Conservation Council

President's Report for the 2008 Annual General Meeting
The Hut, Haigh Park, Livermore Street, Rockhampton
18 June 2008

There have been a number of changes at CCC over the last year, but in spite of, or maybe because of, all the rushing around, we have made some good progress on a number of issues and with community engagement during the year. On the bigger picture, Climate Change, or Global Warming, is still the most important issue. However with the change of Federal Government last November, many of the climate change sceptics have gone the way of John Howard and we need spend less time trying to convince the population of its reality. On the other hand the predictions for our poor old climate are getting worse all the time. As with last year, we find it quite weird that while everyone knows what the problem is, government and industry are going at full speed expanding coal mining as fast as they can. I suppose they know that they only have to say the word "sustainable" often enough and we will all believe them.

Coordinator

We have had three coordinators during the last year. Crystal Jasperson started with us in Feb 2006 and moved on to a full time position with Dept of Mines and Energy in Sept 2007. Pam Malyczek did us a great favour by being a volunteer at FRCC at the time and we were able to employ her to fill this gap at short notice. In February this year Pam left for literally "greener" pastures at Greening Australia. Sara Hanggi had previously come onto the committee and again we were fortunate in finding that she was available to take on the coordinator's position as soon as Pam left. I would like to thank all three of these coordinators for the way they have taken on the job with great enthusiasm and dedication, in spite of the difficulties that this job presents. One of the challenges we have in trying to adequately support our coordinators is the location of this Hut. While the purchase of this Hut has given us the most stable location in the history of CCC, in that it has stopped the perpetual shifting from one rented office to another, it is physically isolated up here. I happened to notice the words of an advertisement placed by CCC for this job in 2005. It said- "If you like meeting new, interesting and vibrant people, visiting distant parts of the Fitzroy Basin, helping save endangered species, repairing land degradation, and don't mind low pay and shocking conditions, please apply now." While the conditions are not really "shocking" they are not ideal so we must do all we can to make the coordinator's life more bearable.

Recently we have made a decision to employ a part time assistant to help the coordinator by taking care of some of the administrative tasks. This will be a two day a week job for which we will be seeking applicants very soon.

Also, while the elected committee is the decision making body, we need the help of other interested members in discussing issues and helping to formulate policy. We used to have an informal group of other members who are happy to receive regular emails on issues and campaigns and contribute to these email discussions. I realise that you might all be overloaded with emails, but if you can help we would really like to hear from you. Just let Sara know and she will include you in this "communications" group as it used to be called.

Campaigns and Projects

CCC is pursuing a large number of issues which are listed in detail in the coordinator's report. I will just mention a few of the key ones here-

Walk Against Warming

Fairly soon after starting at CCC, Pam organised the very successful Walk Against Warming which was a first for Rockhampton. Over a hundred people marched from Stapleton Park across the bridge to the riverbank park. Trying to spread a message about climate change in the coal capital of Qld is not easy. I congratulate all those who volunteered their time and effort to stage this successful event.

Waterpark and Sandy Creeks, Byfield

We are nearly at the end of a long involvement of CCC in efforts to save Sandy Creek from being dammed and to save Waterpark Creek from over-extraction leading to salt intrusion in the rainforest. Work has now started on the construction of the pipeline from Rocky to Yeppoon. It is due to be finished by November 2009 so we only have one more summer during which the Capricorn Coast water supply is totally dependent on pumping from Waterpark Ck. and possible supplementary pumping from Sandy Ck. With total replenishment of the aquifer due to good rainfall this last summer, the probability that Waterpark Ck will cope with a dry summer in six months time seems fairly high. Unfortunately the pipeline will now lead to an explosion of residential development both on the Capricorn Coast and along the pipeline corridor. This will present us with a whole new set of environmental challenges as more natural areas are cleared and turned into housing estates.

Byfield National Park – Vehicles on Five Rocks Beach

Last year, the then Livingstone Shire Council set up a Community Reference Group to help advise them on management of Five Rocks Beach (aka Three Rivers Beach). CCC was invited to participate. However right from the start there was a problem. Instead looking at all options for Five Rocks Beach and seeking the best possible outcome, the terms of reference for the CRG dictated that vehicle access should be allowed on this beach. CCC has been unhappy both with these preset terms of reference and with the "stacking" of the group by four wheel drivers who are interested in having vehicle access to the beach legalised. We have considered on a number of occasions withdrawing from this group, but have deferred such a decision partly due to the change of management brought on by local government amalgamations, which means that the area now comes under Rockhampton Regional Council. We are also less than satisfied with the media coverage from WIN TV who have shown a bias towards beach driving in their reporting. In early July the draft Management Plan for Byfield National Park will be put out for public comment by EPA. We hope that it comes down firmly on the side of not allowing vehicle access thru the NP to Five Rocks Beach.

Dams and Weirs on the Fitzroy River

An ongoing and major issue for us is the continued push for more dams and weirs on the Fitzroy River. Currently there are three areas that concern us:–
(a) Fitzroy Agricultural Corridor
(b) Nathan Dam
(c) Connors River Dam

The Fitzroy Agricultural Corridor came out of the Fitzroy Industry Infrastructure Study. It sees the establishment of intensive feedlots and irrigated cropping between Gogango and

Ridgelands, the building of Rookwood Weir, and the raising of Eden Bann Weir. These weirs will cause a huge length of the Fitzroy River to be permanently ponded water, dramatically reducing the habitat for the Fitzroy River Turtle. This turtle had an original habitat of about 900 km of freshwater riverbank which has already been reduced to less than 700 km. Rookwood weir is the killer as it would cut the last significant length of intact river and reduce it to three isolated fragments. With all the dams and weirs in place, turtle habitat would be fragmented into 11 sections totalling only 60% of its original length.

Nathan Dam, upstream of Theodore is another big one. At 880,000 Ml it is 70 % the size of the Fairbairn Dam at Emerald. Following a successful challenge to the Federal Court in 2003 by QCC and WWF, the proponents of this dam are required to consider in their EIS the full downstream effects of the development that would follow the dam, including the effects on the Great Barrier Reef.

Connors River Dam is being proposed purely to supply coal mining expansion. In a future carbon constrained world, we consider additional coal mining to be an environmentally repugnant, unsustainable, short term activity, and therefore we cannot support this dam.

Causeway Lake

Following the success of the Waterpark Ck ERG, Livingstone Shire adopted this pattern to help solve the problem of silting of Causeway Lake. However as the former Mayor of LSC is not happy with the stance we have taken on Five Rocks Beach, it seems we are not as welcome on this group, and has invited Bruce Zimmer to be on the new group in a private capacity rather than as CCC rep. This is of no immediate concern as we are confident of Bruce's ability to put environmental considerations first.

***Publication of* "Plants of Capricornia"**

The publication of ***Plants of Capricornia*** was an ideal project for CCC to take on. All the hard work of writing and illustrating the book was done by Rhonda and Joel. We took on the role of financial backers as CCC could raise corporate sponsorship and use its tax deducible status to obtain private donations. We also organised pre-publication orders and interest-free loans to secure the $100,000 needed for design and printing of the book. Cathy and I took on the role of distributors. All those who have bought the book have been thrilled with its quality. The print run was 1400 softcovers and 150 hardcovers. The hardcovers sold out in just over a month. To date we have sold a total of 1200 books, sufficient for us to break even, which means that we have now paid back our interest-free loans.

Rockhampton Urban Waterway Initiative (RUWI)

CCC embarked on a project of designing, manufacturing and installing some interpretive signs for Moores Ck. giving natural history information on the creek and its catchment. Sara is making steady progress in bringing to fruition this project which has unfortunately cost CCC more than expected due to a lack of complete scoping and insufficient costing detail at the approval stage.

Rockhampton Waste Disposal – Superdump

A site near Mt Hedlow had been chosen by RCC and LSC for a regional landfill. CCC is not satisfied with the selection process, and assisted the landholder in conducting a public meeting on the site, other lobbying efforts, and media coverage. Since council amalgamations, we have been told that other alternative sites will also be considered. We are currently communicating with RRC to make sure that their selection process is improved.

Duckponds Environmental Reserve

Although this is not strictly a CCC project, there are many CCC members who have been involved in helping Jeff Simmons in trying to secure and manage this important reserve on the Yeppen floodplain. I mention it here to acknowledge the huge effort that Jeff has put in, knowing the he alone has done about 99% of the work there. It hasn't finished. There is more to be done so let Jeff know that you are willing to volunteer and help.

Submissions and ministerial meeting

Written submissions were made to a number government and other bodies. Sara and I met the Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation (i.e. Environment Minister) Andrew McNamara at a Regional Ministerial Community Forum on 7 April and discussed with him a number of our concerns.

Meetings at The Hut

We continued with our ongoing program of organising public speakers on environmental issues and conducted meetings with guest speakers on a range of subjects. The coordinators report will have a full list of quest speakers and topics.

Representatives on other groups

I represent CCC on the CQ a New Millennium. Sara is our rep. on the CHRRUP, the sub-region of FBA covering the Central Highlands. Christine Fraser and Liese Childs represent the environment movement on the Fitzroy River Coastal Catchments (FRCC) committee. Other groups such as the ERGs have been discussed previously.

Funding and Acknowledgements

I wish to thank our funding sources, without whom we could not operate. These are our members, State and Federal governments, and particularly the Fitzroy Basin Association.

I would like to acknowledge all of those who have supported us during the year including our committed volunteers. I wish thank Vice-President Michael McCabe for keeping things running during my 3 months absence overseas last year. I also thank all committee members and others who have contributed in a variety of ways throughout the year.

Conclusion

We need to keep CCC strong so please try and round up more members amongst your friends and family. Don't forget that you can make a big fat Tax Deductible donation before 30 June and get the benefit in your tax return. The global environmental scene is a bit of a worry, but we cannot do much more than awareness-raising in this area. However CCC has an important role to play in the local community and we have shown that we can make a difference and have a few wins on the local and regional scale. I trust that CCC can continue to do so in the coming year.

Ian Herbert
President