Capricorn Conservation Council

President's Report for the 2009 Annual General Meeting
The Hut, Haigh Park, Livermore Street, Rockhampton
25 June 2009

2008-09 has been an exciting year for Capricorn Conservation Council with one major victory and other interesting developments.

Campaigns, Projects and Events

Coal Port for Shoalwater Bay

Last year Waratah Coal released their plans for a new coal mine in the Galilee Basin, a new 500 km railway line, and a coal port in the Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA) just north of Byfield National Park. Little was known about it until Premier Bligh made a big announcement on 15 July giving it her support and proudly saying that it was the first new port on the Qld coast in 25 years. Within a fortnight of the premier's announcement, we organised a public protest meeting at the Yeppoon Town Hall which was packed with over 300 people. The Shoalwater Bay/Byfield area is the largest single tract of land in natural condition on the east coast of Australia south of the Daintree, and it seemed unthinkable that a coal port would be built there. CCC identified from the EPBC flowchart that the federal environment minister could declare the proposal as "clearly unacceptable". The proposal failed five out of the seven initial tests on 'matters of national environmental significance' under the EPBC Act. A concerted lobbying effort by CCC, other local, state and national environment groups, resulted in Minister Garrett declaring the project 'clearly unacceptable' on 5 Sep 2008. We acknowledge the help from Member for Capricornia, Kirsten Livermore, in representing this issue to Kevin Rudd and Peter Garrett.

Bimblebox Nature Refuge

While Waratah have abandoned the Shoalwater Bay site for the coal export port, they have resubmitted the project with the same coal mine but using the export port at Abbott Point near Bowen. This is the first mine to open up the undeveloped Galilee Basin. This mine will totally consume Bimblebox Nature Refuge. However the issues are complex as it is not just a matter of banning mining on all Nature Refuges as this is not possible under current legislation. Also the federal government is involved as they contributed two thirds of the purchase price of Bimblebox.

Byfield National Park – Vehicles on Five Rocks Beach

In July 2008 EPA released the draft Byfield Area Management Plan. We were pleased to see that the plan prohibits vehicle driving on Five Rocks Beach (aka Three Rivers Beach). This issue has been a point of contention between CCC and four wheel drivers. We believe that with Nine Mile Beach and Farnborough Beach both open the vehicles, Five Rocks Beach (only 4.5km) is one area that should be kept vehicle free. This is based on scientific studies that have found that driving on beaches causes a lot more damage to small creatures that live in the sand than most people think. We have made a submission to the draft plan and have been advised that a final decision will probably not be made till the end of 2009.

Ensham Mine flooding and pump out into the Fitzroy River

Following the floods in Emerald in Jan-Feb 2008, Ensham Mine, which was built on the Nogoa River flood plain, had flood water break through a levee bank and fill several of their open cut pits. 138,000 mega-litres of water was pumped back into the river over the next 6

months. Most people in the region were aware of the huge problems this caused in terms of the deteriorating water quality effecting not just human health, but also livestock and irrigation industries. CCC's main concern was the effect on the natural ecosystems. CCC was invited by member for Rockhampton, Robert Schwarten, to be part of the Fitzroy River Water Quality Technical Working Group which conducted weekly meetings from Oct to Dec 2008. We are still engaged with much the same group which is now looking to the future in trying to prevent anything similar to the Ensham debacle ever happening again. We have certainly had a very clear demonstration of why mining should never have been allowed on a flood plain.

Dams and Weirs on the Fitzroy River

The state government seems determined to push ahead with implementing all the dam building proposed in the Central Qld Regional Water Supply Strategy. At present the emphasis is on the Nathan Dam on the Dawson River and Conners River Dam at Mt Bridget. CCC is involved in Community Liaison Groups for both dams. They are both in the EIS preparation process at present.

Rockhampton Waste Disposal – Superdump

Rockhampton Regional Council has reviewed its plans for a regional landfill following public disquiet over the selection of a site near Mt Hedlow last year. CCC has had a number of briefings from RRC on this project and appreciates the difficult position faced by the council in selecting an appropriate site. RRC is now more aware of community concerns and appear to be doing their best to address these issues. No final announcement has yet been made. DERM is working on a waste management strategy for the state which should be finished by the end of the year.

Duckponds Environmental Reserve

Jeff Simmons is still working day and night to manage Duckponds. Most, but not all, of the fencing has been done and Jeff still needs a hand from others to help hang some gates. The biggest problem in the last year has been vandalism by hoons trying to get thru the gates.

Publication of **"Plants of Capricornia"**

The publication of ***Plants of Capricornia*** was a great success and we now have only ten books left. I would like to thank Rhonda and Joel and all others who helped on this project.

World Environment Day

A great deal of organising was put into the World Environment Day that we held here on Sat 6 June. Those who turned up had a very enjoyable day thanks to the music supplied by Biorhythms. It is a pity that the numbers were less than we hoped for. We have learnt from this day that more needs to be spent on publicity if such an event is to be run in the future. Thanks to Crystal, Pam and Janet for their hard work.

Meetings at The Hut

We have had fewer meetings with public speakers on environmental issues in the last year. There is difficulty in getting speakers and when we do, the attendance has been fairly disappointing. Any suggestions on how we should overcome these problems would be greatly appreciated.

Coordinator

We have had a number of staff changes during the last year. Sara Hanggi was here from Jan 2008 until Sept 2008. Alison Jones did an excellent job in filling the gap at short notice and was part time coordinator until the end of 2008 when we she advised that she was not able to

devote sufficient time to the job due to her coral research program. We advertised for a coordinator in Dec and Jan and appointed Rory Brown as a full time coordinator in Feb 2009 but he left in mid April. Since then we are fortunate in having, not one, but two very capable people arrive on the scene. Janet Barrett, who has just completed her Environmental Science degree, has been appointed as part-time coordinator for three days a week. Allan Briggs, president of Birds Australia Capricornia, has been engaged as a Project Officer to work on specific environmental issues for nominally two days per week. However these two excellent staff members still need the backup of interested members, whether on the committee or not, to provide input, discuss issues, and help formulate policy.

Funding

We are very thankful for all our funding sources. These are our own members, state and federal governments, and particularly the Fitzroy Basin Association. At present we are fortunate in having sufficient funding to allow us to employ our staff. Future funding will be through the federal govt's Caring For Our Country Program, and we are not optimistic of having the same level of funding that we have enjoyed in the past few years.

Submissions and ministerial meeting

Written submissions were made to a number of government departments and other bodies. There are always far too many EISs that need scrutiny than we can handle. The plethora of Liquified Natural Gas projects proposed for Curtis Island is a looming nightmare that Janet is doing well trying to keep track of.

Representatives on other groups

Liese Childs represent the environment movement on the Fitzroy River Coastal Catchments (FRCC), and on the Environmental Advisory Committee for Shoalwater Bay Training Area. Alison Jones has been involved in a number of groups as an environmental rep, including Connors Dam CLG. I represent CCC on the Fitzroy River TWG and Nathan Dam CLG. Hopefully with some stability of coordinator and project officer, Janet and Allan will be able to represent CCC on future groups and committees.

Media coverage

CCC has had good coverage on most issues of importance over the year, particularly since the airing of the controversial issues of the Waratah Coal Port, Byfield beach driving, and Fitzroy River water quality. Our effectiveness in changing political decisions is much greater when coming from ordinary people who have been motivated by this media coverage.

Conclusion

I would like to thank all of those who have played their part in supporting CCC during the year including our committed volunteers, members of the committee, and others. We need to keep CCC's membership up 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. CCC has an important role to play in the local community and we have shown that we can make a difference and have some big and small wins on the local and regional scale. I trust that CCC can continue to do so in the coming year.

Ian Herbert
President