

## Secretary's Report. 2017-18

In terms of progress towards environmental protection, it has to be said that the 2017-2018 financial year has been difficult. We have seen the dumping of the Native Veg Act, and laws introduced that allow massive increases in land-clearing, and a 'remake' of the state's logging laws. This latter has resulted in reduced stream buffers, the introduction of clear-felling in state forests, a reduction in threatened species protection, and the remapping of protected old-growth and rainforest to allow their logging.

At a federal level we now have a mining industry lawyer from Western Australia as the environment minister, and continued denial of climate change, which now makes it impossible for Australia to meet its Paris accord emissions reduction commitments.

On the home front, our 5 man bush regeneration team has been employed continuously until early July when we finally ran out of funding. That work included weed eradication, re-vegetation, and consultancy worth more than \$145,000, which includes contracts with Local Land Services, private property owners, and the Office of Environment and Heritage under its Saving our Species program. Since early July however, we have been unable to obtain additional funding, but with possibly over \$150,000 worth of work in the pipeline, we are hopeful the team will soon be up and running again.

Our membership numbers are holding well, at between 80 and 90, with new members still signing up. However, income from shop sales has dropped significantly which is forcing us to consider our future as an organisation. That's something that will be discussed in some detail later at this meeting.

This, our 30<sup>th</sup> year, the CEC was honoured by being presented with a "Reweavers of the Tapestry" award for services to the environment. At the presentation ceremony, founding member Claire Purvis (Aman) gave an excellent presentation speech, and our President, another long serving member, Theo Jongen accepted the award from the Greens' Upper House member, Jeremy Buckingham.

Our campaigns this year have been varied, included a plethora of problems associated with the upsurge of intensive horticulture, particularly water usage, and a complete lack of meaningful regulation and compliance monitoring and enforcement.

Another matter we have been involved with is the post fire management of the Chambigne Nature Reserve. In this instance the Environment Minister actually took our concerns seriously and forwarded our recommendations to the regional office, which is currently looking one of those recommendations, to acquire some of Council's Rockview Station for addition to the Reserve.

We have also supported Harwood residents in their ongoing problems associated with the Slipway and its plans for an industrial precinct on the island, including several letters and submissions.

Submissions and reports have also been compiled on proposed expansion of a gravel quarry at Pillar Valley, the proposed asphalt plant at Mororo, an illegal timber mill at the Pinnacles, yet another submission on the proposed 120 lot subdivision at Iluka, Santos' Pilligar CSG DA, and reported on illegal trial bike track construction in Candole State Forest.

We also made submission to changes of legislation placed on public exhibition for comment, including the review of the Regional Forests Agreements, review of the Regional Ports Strategy, the draft Coastal Management planning policy, Council's vehicular beach access plan, and the NSW Water Reform Action Plan,

The CEC also compiled a series of scientific reports, authored by Fig Forest, Patricia, and myself, under contract to OEH on 4 threatened species, and pro-bono reports on 2 others. Patricia has also been working with Koala expert, Steve Phillips, the OEH and Clarence Valley Council in formulating strategies to protect Koalas. As well Fig and I were invited to assist at a Coffs Harbour flora "experts' forum" to determine how best to protect some 100 threatened north coast species.

Andi Mellis and I have also been surveying a large property at the Pinnacles on a voluntary basis, in support of the national parks service's interest in acquiring the land which would join Fortis Creek National Park to the Corymbia Nature Reserve. Similar work last year resulted in OEH acquiring land to join up the three crown land portions that currently form Koukandowie Nature Reserve

Something that raised its ugly head very late in the financial year and continues to bubble along is the mining exploration happening at Cangai, and now something that looks to be building into a major campaign for the current year. We will be discussing that issue later in the ordinary meeting.

During the year, the CEC hosted two public forums, one on behalf of NEFA on the latest forestry reforms, the other for the Nature Conservation Council on changes to the biodiversity protection laws. Both attracted a reasonable number of people, though mainly the 'converted' as usual.

The Centre's members have also been responsible for writing the weekly Voices for the Earth column in the Daily Examiner. While this is strictly a Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition initiative, I think we can also take credit as Leonie Blain, Stan Musared. Patricia and myself are all CEC members.

I would like to give a special vote of thanks to Pat for her work as coordinator of the Land for Wildlife program which continues to sign up and assess properties despite the funding being no longer available.

While on Land for Wildlife I should also acknowledge Peter Turland's continued involvement and invaluable landholder engagement work he is undertaking in the Tucabia, Pillar Valley area

I would also like to thank a whole range of other volunteers who have worked so hard to keep the wheels turning. Jay Wilson, who is definitely making his mark on the environmental scene in San Francisco, continues to manage our web site and offer regular advice, Meredith Stanton who continues to manage our Facebook page from Billy's Creek home, Theo for taking on the President's role and minutes secretary, Simon for keeping the shelves of the shop stocked, undertaking research and keeping his ear to the ground on all pertinent issues. Kurt for his invaluable IT input, Ashleigh for his willingness to fill in whenever others are unable to man the shop, and Steve for continuing to represent the CEC on Council's Climate Change Committee (along with other CEC members, Leonie Blain, Janet Cavanaugh, and Nick Reeve, who officially represent other community groups).

Appreciation too of Michael Porteous' efforts at 'media watch' and alerting us to any environmental or social justice issues as they arise. Of course early in the financial year, Annette Cook volunteered and did a great job cataloguing our library before, unfortunately, finding a paying job.

Simon Abbott and the weed team, Rob Bryant, Paddy Stanton, Dylan Hearne and Kurt Nowlan deserve mention and thanks for their reliability. The fact that they have stayed together as a team for more than 4 and a half years is testament to their commitment to the task, and I thank them for that. I'd like to think of Simon as part of my own succession Plan, and he has already taken on the role of project manager, liaising with various agencies that are responsible for conservation land management. A special thank you to Tom Davidson who continues to donate tree seedlings for sale in the shop, warm appreciation to all other members and friends for their on-going support, and sincere apologies to anyone I may have forgotten

Regards, John Edwards (Honorary Secretary), Clarence Environment Centre.