

NEWSLETTER 1 – SUMMER 2012



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Some Positive Environmental News

2011 is not one that environmentalists will look back on with any enthusiasm. In NSW, logging abuses have risen, land clearing reached the highest levels since 1980, Marine Park declarations were put on hold with some protection for Grey Nurse Sharks removed. There are proposals to open up national parks for mountain biking, and tourist development, and state forests have been turned into hunting zones. However, amidst all this carnage, there are some positives which it gives us pleasure to report.

Even with a severe financial crisis in Europe and the continued malaise in the U.S., renewable energy surpassed fossil fuels for the first time in new power-plant investments in 2011.

In the US, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative added 16,000 jobs and \$1.6 billion in value to Northeast economies. While initiative was being implemented, conservative groups like Americans for Prosperity claimed the regional cap-and-trade program would drive rates up 90 percent, but an independent analysis shows that after three years, the program has set a course for \$1.2 billion in ratepayer savings.

Again in the US, it has been announced that America is a \$1.9 billion exporter of solar products. With a high-profile trade war against the Chinese brewing in the solar market, it's often forgotten that the U.S. is actually a net exporter of solar products to

China and the rest of the world, and with 73 cents out of every dollar spent on a solar installation staying within the U.S., this sector is providing immense domestic value.

Good news also that Australian native forest logging industry is in dire straits with an international crash in demand for native forest woodchips, which has seen the industry desperately scrambling for replacement markets.

While the native-forest saw log sector will continue, the industrial logging model that has driven environmental destruction and public conflict is in rapid decline. The industry's Plan B is the economically suspect and public relations nightmare of what the Wilderness Society has dubbed "dead koala power" - large-scale power stations run on native forest woodchips. This is a clear sign of desperation, and one we sincerely hope will never be adopted.

John Edwards

A farcical Inquiry into Forestry

The Federal Inquiry into the future of the Forestry Industry released its findings at the end of last year, a flawed document, that would be an affront to any reputable forest ecologist.

There is now widespread acknowledgment that forests are being logged unsustainably, in an attempt to meet unachievable wood supply contracts, with Australia's largest buyer currently suing the government for non-

supply of timber which will likely cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

The chronic timber shortage is seeing increasing cases of illegal logging of protected forest communities, virtual clear-felling, and a criminal disregard for threatened species. At Boambee, and Wedding Bells near Coffs Harbour, core Koala habitat has been heavily logged this year, and Orara East State Forest, another key habitat area for this iconic animal, will be logged in the coming year.

All these problems were spelled out in submissions to the Inquiry, but in a display of extreme arrogance, the Committee stated *“submissions that have simply criticised the industry and called for an end to particular kinds of forestry have not been included in the report.”* As a result, unsustainable logging, supply shortages, illegal logging activity, and the dieback resulting from over-logging and bad post logging management, get no mention in the Report.



Excessive logging at Clouds Creek State Forest

The trend of the Report was set in the introduction where the Chairman stated, *“the idea of keeping an individual tree because it represents “bio diversity” (sic) or is a “home for animals”, is wrong”*, the rationale being that the tree will eventually die anyway.

A single page of the report is devoted to biodiversity admitting that: *“The management of forest biodiversity is another heavily debated topic, and the Committee*

received copious evidence about the best ways to protect and improve biodiversity”.”

The Committee, seemingly overwhelmed by this mass of evidence, ignored it all, explaining: *“Rather than provide a survey of the evidence about the impact of forest management on biodiversity, the Committee wishes to report on a possible mechanism to encourage private forest managers to manage biodiversity in their own forests”*.”

That mechanism, put to the Committee by its 'Guru', Southern Cross University's Professor Vanclay, is an excellent idea which has been promoted by environmentalists for decades, the provision of stewardship payments to landowners to manage their forests for biodiversity.

One of the Committee's 'comments' on biodiversity is, *“the Committee believes that there is a pressing need for more information about how fire regimes affect different kinds of forests”*.”

There is of course a wealth of information already available, including a recent report by ANU's Professor Lindenmayer which roundly condemns the current logging and fire management in state forests. Clearly critical reports do not fit with the Committee's aspirations, as they too are ignored.

Instead, the Committee, whose terms of reference restrict it to considering the future of the timber industry, then makes the extraordinary comment that: *“This should include further research into the fire risks in National Parks”*.”

This connection between the timber industry and national parks is expanded on with the statement that: *“Further evidence suggested that logging in National Parks may assist in reducing the risk of fires therein”*.” This so-called 'evidence' was obtained, not from a forest ecologist, or fire management expert, but from Kyogle Councillor, and timber industry representative, Lindsay Passfield. So much for the Inquiry's consideration of the

“copious evidence” received on the impacts of forest management on biodiversity.

This one-eyed, self-serving, politically motivated report, that ignores all criticism of the status quo, has been a monstrous waste of taxpayers' money.

John Edwards



Is it Lowland Rainforest?

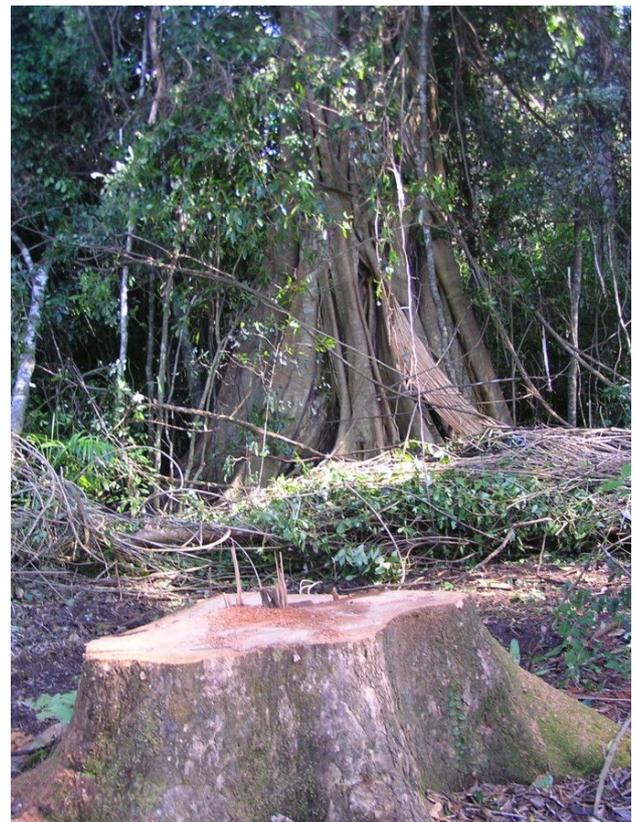
Forty years ago there was a highly biodiverse old-growth forest community at Grange State Forest, measuring some 20 hectares. Today that forest would be acknowledged as the endangered Lowland Rainforest which was described and listed as an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) in 2005. Unfortunately, the then Forestry Commission of NSW saw little value in this forest of largely over-mature trees, many of them entangled with Strangler Figs and native vines, and inflicted upon it the popular Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) program.

TSI is the practice of selecting the densest groups of the largest and oldest trees and cutting them down to provide an open space where the additional sunlight will ensure the regeneration of eucalyptus species, which will out-compete the rainforest species, and provide harvestable trees in the future.

That future was mid 2010 when the now Forests NSW somehow mapped the area as Scribbly Gum – Blackbutt (despite neither

species occurring there) and logged the entire forest, removing up to 80% of the basal area and, using the excuse of soil disturbance to assist regeneration, flattened all unwanted rainforest trees.

When the Clarence Environment Centre investigated the logging, they took photographs of Tamarind, Pepperberry, Bangalow Palms, and a range of other rainforest species scattered across the landscape. This was later confirmed by an independent ecologist employed by the Department of Environment, who identified a half hectare site as the Lowland Rainforest, (section 31), stating that: “The EEC varied from having a closed but uneven canopy in the small unlogged stands, to **no canopy and bare earth** where it had been logged.”



Illegal logging in old-growth rain forest at Grange State Forest

The independent report on that half hectare stated that “Of the 116 species noted in paragraph 2 of the Scientific Determination, 47 were identified ... Conformity between the logged and unlogged areas was also apparent from the fallen debris.”

However, across the whole 20 hectares, we recorded more than 150 rainforest species, 74 of which are on the Scientific Committee's list of indicative species for Lowland Rainforest.

Some Lowland Rainforest has survived within logging exclusion zones along creek banks. So the question we have asked the authorities is: **Was the 1970s disturbance, and subsequent eucalypt regeneration, sufficient to disqualify the community from being considered rainforest, allowing it to be logged to glory, causing severe fragmentation and loss of ecological connectivity between the remaining Lowland Rainforest remnants?**

As well we have written to Ministers Hodgkinson (Industry and Investment) and Parker (Environment), asking the following questions:

All of this raises questions which we would like the Minister to answer for us:

* Given that no "identification key" had been prepared for Lowland Rainforest, and Forests NSW will shortly face court charged with having illegally logged an Endangered Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest Community at Doubleduke State Forest, have any field identification keys been prepared for the numerous EECs that have been listed in the last 10 years. If so, which?

* How did the Grange Lowland Rainforest community become mapped as the dry sclerophyll Scribbly Gum, Blackbutt Forest community?

* Did none of the six (6) ecologists named as having been involved in the ecological survey of that Grange Compartment prior to the logging, identify the mapping error? If not, given that no one could have failed to notice that it was not a dry sclerophyll forest, and that there were no Blackbutt of Scribbly Gums present, why not?

* Given that Forests NSW's Threatened Species License clearly states that **"This license does not authorise the carrying out of an activity that is likely to harm an endangered ecological community,** and there

was no mention of EECs in the Ecological report, were those six ecologists instructed to look for EECs? Again, if not, why not?

* Did the harvest planner/forester who marked up the forest for the logging, report the mapping error? Was he/she required to notify anyone of mapping errors, and if not, why not?

* Given the rarity of Lowland Rainforest, which has also been recently listed federally as a Critically Endangered Ecological Community, does Forests NSW intend to rehabilitate the site in line with the recommendations made to the OEHL by the rainforest specialist, Ms Horton?

* Why, having followed your Regional Biodiversity Officer's recommendation to employ soil and rainforest specialists to support a prosecution, did your Department not prosecute, and instead only issue a penalty notice, the fine for which would have come nowhere near covering the cost of those specialists?

* Given its extreme rarity, and threats posed to Lowland Rainforest, as evidenced by its recent listing as Critically Endangered under the EPBC Act, why have the rainforest specialist's recommendations for rehabilitation of the Grange site not been required?

When we get answers, we will pass them on.

John Edwards

More Koala Habitat under threat

A proposed rural residential development at Waterview was initially placed on exhibition towards the end of 2010. The Clarence Environment Centre made a submission opposing the proposal at that time mainly on the grounds that it would impact adversely on the local Koala population. However, of even greater concern is rural residential development generally, which is arguably the most environmentally destructive of all residential categories, as they make a major contribution to urban sprawl and vegetation loss.

The Council referred the application to the NSW Planning Department which has apparently made suggestions to make the development more acceptable, so now the developer is back with a revised application. While acknowledging concessions to protect native vegetation at the south and west of the site, we still believe further design changes should be made given the critical importance of forest cover for the local Koala population. Our submission made the following recommendations:

- The relatively heavy vegetation cover at the northeastern corner should be protected, with two blocks of 4 Lots reduced to 2 to allow retention of native vegetation.
- No flora and fauna assessment was exhibited (we are becoming increasingly critical of Council over their continued failure to place all documents on exhibition). However, comments made in other documents suggest that assessment was inadequate. Therefore, a thorough flora and fauna survey should be undertaken, including a target survey for threatened species that are known to occur locally.
- We disagreed with the claim that: *“limiting the movement of dogs between dusk and dawn is the single most effective way of ensuring that dogs and Koalas do not come in contact.”* Dogs and cats should be excluded entirely.
- Suggestions like the placing of rope in swimming pools to allow Koalas the means of escape are impractical and impossible to police. Koala-proof pool fencing should be required.
- We question the need for boundary fences. This is not a subdivision that will support livestock. In the event that fences are allowed, **barbed wire should be banned.**

- Supplementary plantings of Koala food trees should be mandatory along all roads and drainage lines, with any dead seedlings to be replaced immediately.
- The aim of *“no net loss of core Koala habitat”* should be replaced with an aim to achieve a net gain of core Koala habitat.
- The Koala Plan of Management identifies the drainage line through the centre of the proposed subdivision as a Koala movement corridor. However, the plans released by the developer shows the extended Moonbiana Drive wandering back and forth, cutting this critical corridor no less than 3 times. This must be changed.

John Edwards

Rural residential development

The over-supply of land zoned rural residential was a serious concern expressed to the then Planning NSW during consultation for the Regional Strategies some 4 years ago. It was pointed out that Clarence Valley Council in particular had inherited an excessive amount of rural residential zoned land from pre-amalgamation, and strong representations were made to the Minister to wind back that zoning, much of which is on forested land. Those requests were ignored.



A typical example of the reality of rural residential development, where high conservation value forest, with extremely high levels of biodiversity has been reduced to lawn across an entire block.

Since the Clarence Valley LEP was adopted, retaining all previously zoned rural residential land, the Environment Centre has unsuccessfully argued the case against proposed subdivisions at Mountainview, Burrigan Lane (Coutts Crossing), West Yamba, Gulmarrad, Clarenza, Lawrence, and now at Waterview Heights. In each case, endangered ecological communities, mapped wildlife corridors, or other high conservation value habitat was lost forever.

In the case of the Moonbiana Drive proposal, the 27 allotments averaging about half a hectare, will ultimately result in the removal of most of the native vegetation that currently covers the site.

Koala decline, the bigger picture

Cumulative impacts

Koala numbers are in serious decline across Australia, and none more so than on the NSW north coast. This has led to their being listed internationally as an endangered species, but still only Vulnerable under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act. The rapid decline in numbers has led to the Federal Government considering listing the Koala as threatened under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, a determination that has been under consideration for more than 2 years while the Federal Environment Minister procrastinates under strong pressure from the development lobby.

The Clarence Valley Koala Plan of Management recognises (page ix) that “*The Woombah koala population is in imminent danger of extinction and it is highly likely that the Iluka koala population is already extinct*”. Recent sightings of a female Koala with young at Iluka suggests that population may still be hanging in there. However, the Iluka population situation must be considered perilous.

At Shannon Creek, where a survey for the dam's Plan of Management (Greenloaning Biostudies 2005) estimated as many as 240

Koalas could be present, regular monitoring since the access road construction in 2006 destroyed a critical movement corridor, has failed to find any trace of Koalas.

A viable population persisting in the Ashby area has seen several hectares of core habitat destroyed for rural residential development in the last two years, with much more rural residential development planned in the future in surrounding areas already zoned for that purpose.

Early last year Council approved a rural residential development in bushland east of Coutts Crossing which will see more than 10 hectares of forest removed, despite the area being mapped as a regional wildlife movement corridor, and the ecological assessment identifying the presence of Koalas. In that case, the developer successfully argued that the numbers were too low to constitute a viable population, as defined under the State Environmental Planning Policy 44. That State regulation, supposedly in place to protect Koalas and Koala habitat, is now being used by developers to 'write off' Koala populations as unviable as their numbers inevitably drop.

The proposed Pacific Highway upgrade will remove more than 500 hectares of forest in the Clarence Valley alone, with many hundreds more north of the Iluka Road, and south of Wells Crossing, again through areas where Koalas are known to inhabit, albeit in low numbers. That project has imposed major impacts on koala habitat in one of the country's last strongholds for the species around Coffs Harbour.

The Environment Department's Private Native Forestry Unit has approved logging in hundreds of hectares of private forests in the Coffs Harbour LGA, ignoring Council's concerns that the logging infringes its Koala Plan of Management.

Forests NSW has been roundly condemned for heavily logging core Koala habitat in Boambee State Forest, but still allowed to do

so by the State Government regulators. Koala habitat is also being heavily logged at Clouds Creek State Forest, up to 80% of vegetation removed in some areas, and now plans have been released to log Ellis and Orara East State Forests, where Koala high use areas have also been identified.

And so the destruction continues, with never any requirement for a developer to consider those cumulative impacts.

It is well known that diseases such as Chlamydia, which have had such devastating impacts on Koala populations, are triggered by stress resulting from loss of habitat. Fragmentation of habitat has further contributed to the species' demise by forcing Koalas to spend more time on the ground where they become vulnerable to dog attack and vehicle strike.

On a positive note however, CEC members Stan and Magda Mussared have spent over 20 years replanting their rural residential block at Waterview with an assortment of trees including preferred Koala feed species, and in recent years have regularly recorded and photographed Koalas on their property. While the latest development proposal at Waterview is a real concern, we are hopeful that the local population is on the increase and possibly expanding with numerous recent sightings across that general area, bounded by the Orara and Clarence Rivers, from Seelands to Bawden's Bridge

John Edwards

The Koala's fate, another step Koalas and the Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The Koala is not listed as a nationally threatened species under Federal legislation? Last year the Environment minister Tony Burke deferred his decision on whether the koala is to be listed under the Federal EPBC Act.

In April 2012 the Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke again delayed his determination for another 10 weeks.

It appears that Tony Burke is reluctant to give the koala the protection it needs. It may be too late to help the coastal dwelling koalas because their habitat has been destroyed or fragmented to such an extent that the remaining populations are probably unviable. It's clear that the minister is captured by interests in the logging and property development industries. The Coffs coast is a good example.

There are now less than 80,000 Koalas. There used to be millions. Between 1900 and 1930 hundreds of thousands of koalas were slaughtered. The Australian public became so outraged that politicians were forced to intervene. That time has come again.

Although public submissions closed last year it is never too late to contact the minister to air your views. With that in mind the CEC produced a little YouTube video - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5XKuLMye_0 and set up a koala petition on [Change.org- http://www.change.org/petitions/help-stop-the-koala-decline](http://www.change.org/petitions/help-stop-the-koala-decline)



I recently read a book on the international slave trade and the abolition movement. The modern abolition movement started in England and the primary weapon used by the abolitionists was the petition aimed at

parliamentarians. The petition movement was very successful.

Is there a future for petitions in the contemporary on-line world? It's hard to tell. Certainly there have been some successes like the campaign to get Apple to improve working conditions in its Chinese factories.

The response to our petition has been slow. It appears that the ability to use social networks like Twitter and Facebook is an advantage. Organisations like Getup are well placed because it has a large mailing list. It's been a learning experience. Any CEC member who would like to manage the CEC's social network would be welcome. Maybe talk to Jay and Kurt.

Contact the Environment Minister Now!

Email: tony.burke.mp@aph.gov.au Tel: (02) 6277 7640 Fax: (02) 6273 6101 Twitter: http://twitter.com/tony_burke

Simon

Simon's efforts to achieve an added level of protection for Koalas should not be overlooked. Almost single-handedly he put together a short video, professionally filmed by Jimmy Malecki, with a telling message to Federal Environment Minister, Tony Burke, in which he donned a koala suit, courtesy of Friends of the Koala in Lismore and delivers the rhyming message he had written himself. That message has now been widely distributed via the Internet and can be viewed on YouTube.

John

Another small win.

In mid 2011, we received a plea for advice from a resident of Wallaby Creek, northwest of Bonalbo. Their property has had an unidentified substance dropped or sprayed on their property by a crop dusting aircraft. It was also dropped into Wallaby Creek which is a tributary of the Clarence.

We provided that advice, and early in the new year we received an email advising us that

they had had a visit from a Tenterfield Council officer, to advise them that Council had fined Tapps Aviation \$1500 in relation to the incident.

Apparently there was some initial questioning of the chemical / superphosphate issue, but upon clarification the fine was paid. It is our understanding that it was "pelleted seed", which is often coated with fertilizer or, sometimes, pesticide.

The fine is paltry, but these "cowboy" operators must be dragged into line, we cannot have even benign substances dropped onto other people's properties.

Out in the bush

Stan and Magda Musared brought a strange object into the Environment Centre recently, which they had found growing on a Gum Tree on their property, wanting to know if anyone knew what it was.



*Female gall-making scale insect in the genus
Apiomorpha (Hemiptera Eriococcidae).*

As we couldn't answer their query other than to suggest it was some sort of gall, so we emailed photographs of it to the Australian Museum in Sydney, where they have a team that answer those types of questions. Those guys are a mine of information and within days we received an answer saying "*The gall is a female of a species of gall-making scale insect in the genus Apiomorpha (Hemiptera: Eriococcidae) – male galls are <math><1/20^{th}</math> of the size, are usually found nearby, and will look like little trumpets or similar on the surface of leaves. The female insect inside the gall is a popular bush tucker item (they taste slightly sweet, but not much else)*".



End view of female gall



*male gall of scale insect
possible g. *Apiomorpha**

We searched our files and found a photograph of what could well be the male insect's gall, and certainly answers the description of "little trumpets".

Clouds Creek Rainforest Assessment

The status of rainforest in State Forests is becoming a major issue. The example of Grange is a case in point where, after the CEC's revelations that Lowland Rainforest had been logged Forests NSW's Corporate Botanist, Doug Binns, expressed the opinion in an email to his superiors that it was not. Binns provided no evidence to support his claim, but correctly predicted that, in relation to the Environment Department seeking the opinion of an independent rainforest specialist, "it is likely their interpretation will differ from mine".

When our team met with Crown Forests investigators in Compartment 79 of Clouds Creek State Forest last year, we raised the matter of the failure to leave a 20m buffer zone around the rainforest verges. This is a requirement that applies only to Warm Temperate Rainforest (WTRf) and does not apply to other rainforest types.

The Crown Forests division subsequently investigated our claim, not through a site assessment, but by a review of mapping data, and advised us that "OEH staff has assessed the area referred to in the CEC field notes and have found that the mapped rainforest type has **not** been defined as warm temperate rainforest type". Of course, they didn't say what type of rainforest it was defined as.

The rainforest issue at Clouds Creek was not the only concern raised by CEC. We also pointed out that the logging had seen an average basal area removal almost double the 40% allowable, and that large trees containing hollows, that should have been retained as habitat trees, had been logged, with barely any habitat trees retained.

OEH's response to that concern was that: "*The licence conditions relating to the selection and retention of hollow-bearing and recruitment trees are open to interpretation*", and went on to excuse these alleged breaches claiming other areas, about 20 hectares, had not been logged. That, they claimed, would bring the "average" basal area logged down to the acceptable 40%, and the required number of habitat trees would also be in that unlogged forest.

We believe, as do lawyers from the Environmental Defenders Office, that the habitat tree retention requirement are unambiguous and very clear and, if available, 10 hollow-bearing trees must be left for each 2 hectares of the net harvest area.

Incredibly though, just 18 months later, Forests NSW has now announced its intention to log the remainder. This led to the CEC auditing that unlogged area, and making a full assessment of the rainforest that surrounds much of the area to determine its true status.



The Environment Centre's forest audit team. Jay, Simon and Meredith, at Ellis State Forest.

Firstly we assessed the forest community to determine whether it was in fact Warm Temperate Rainforest (WTRf), and therefore requiring a 20-metre buffer. In all 80 rainforest species were identified, 76 of which are known to occur in WTRf. However, most of those species are also known to occur in Subtropical Rainforest.

The Catchment Management Authority has prepared a simple checklist which shows WTRf is virtually devoid of buttressed species such as Figs, Yellow Carabeen, and Blue Quandong, none of which were found at Clouds Creek. Other common Subtropical Rainforest species conspicuously absent from the Clouds Creek rainforest are Rosewood, White Booyong and Giant Stinging Tree, while species indicative of WTRf, Coachwood, Soft Corkwood, Crabapple, and Hill Kanuka were all recorded.

So in conclusion, we believe the rainforest community at Clouds Creek is indeed Warm Temperate Rainforest, and we have notified the relevant agencies that a 20-metre buffer zone should be provided. As well we believe Forests NSW should explain how its ecologists (3 named in the ecological report), and supposedly experienced foresters failed to properly identify the community in the field.

The greatest myth we uncovered was that the unlogged area contained large numbers of hollow-bearing trees. In reality, we found that all three unlogged patches had been subjected to the infamous Timber Stand Improvement program of the 1970s where forests were clear-felled, leaving occasional mature seed trees. This means that, far from containing the hundreds of hollow-bearing trees to offset the logging of habitat trees elsewhere in the compartment, these areas are virtually devoid of any such trees.

Again, Forests NSW, and the OEH inspectors that allowed the destruction of habitat trees to go unpunished, should be called to account. However, numerous letters questioning these failures have so far remained unanswered.

Coal seam gas (CSG) mining update

The Clarence Environment Centre has been heavily involved in the CSG issue for at least 2 years, and was recently approached by another local group, that had previously been operating mainly on Facebook, with a view to forming a coalition of groups to oppose CSG exploration and mining in the Clarence Valley.

We organised a preliminary meeting with representatives of existing concerned organisations at the Environment Centre which, as a result of a front page editorial in the Daily Examiner the day before, attracted a significant number of people from across the community.

As a result we relocated to the South Grafton ex services club, where about 50 people introduced themselves and laid out their concerns. The meeting, which was facilitated by Seanine Cooper, resolved to call the group the Clarence Valley Alliance against CSG (CVCACSG), and laid out a list of draft objectives.

This latest surge of interest is the result of Red Sky Energy's move to the second phase of its CSG exploration in the Whiporie area north of Grafton. In a letter to the Premier, the Centre has expressed concern over the lack of community consultation in relation to Red Sky's proposed drilling and flaring of a pilot well at its Talma site, about 1.8km north of Battens Bight. Despite Red Sky's claim that environment groups will be consulted, neither the Environment Centre, or the region's peak environment group, The North Coast Environment Council, have been contacted directly by Red Sky, so we are wondering - who has been consulted?

We also expressed concerns over the lack of rigour required in the environmental assessment process, such as the potential for water pollution, pointing out that the original Review of Environmental Factors (REF), released 6 months earlier for the original test core drilling, failed to even mention ground water.

The Centre pointed out to the Premier that the Talma well, while on cleared land itself, is surrounded by public native forest, adjacent to an indistinct line of billabongs and wetlands which drain directly into Bungawalbin Creek by way of Myrtle Creek. And that this area is considered to be part of the 'Lower Bungawalbin Catchment Wetland Complex', a recognised wetland of national significance.

Despite the sensitive nature of the area, Red Sky admits that polluted run-off is possible, with its earlier REF explaining that any unexpected spills of pollutants will trigger an unspecified Emergency Response Plan, which includes reporting the incident to the relevant determining authority, which we believe is simply not good enough.

One point we were at pains to make to the Government was the matter of cumulative impacts. While cleared land can be found to accommodate a single exploratory well, an expansion into full extraction will see hundreds of hectares of native vegetation, including threatened species habitat, destroyed to construct dozens more wellheads, roads, containment dams, and pipelines. Despite that, Red Sky's earlier REF claims its proposal will have no cumulative impacts.

The Centre strongly believes that, in fairness to both the mining companies and local residents, the overall and cumulative impacts of full production should be fully assessed before any more exploration is allowed. There is no point in allowing exploration if future extraction is deemed undesirable.

This is an issue that simply will not go away. At some stage the authorities will have to come to terms with the fact that there must be recognised no go areas for mining which include drinking water catchments, prime agricultural land, areas where mining will impact groundwater, rivers and wetlands, and other areas of high conservation value.



The bush today.

**I listen to the bulldozer as it plows
along the road
I watch out for the log truck with its
heavy deathly load
The yellow grinding grader scratches
at the earth bound soil
The fluorescent jacketed loggers
chainsaw screams with toil**

**I walked into the bush today to find
what its about,
I walked into the bush today and
poor dumb man did shout
You haven't got your jackets on, you
haven't been inducted
Boys you aren't just allowed to look,
you could have really
fucked it.**

Fig Forest

CSG Industry Propaganda



The coal seam gas industry is currently saturating the airwaves with pro-industry propaganda, referring to a mythical product called “natural coal seam gas”, cunningly adding the word 'natural' to make us believe they are producing a clean, green product.

The fact is that “natural” gas is methane trapped in large 'bubbles' underground, and is easily tapped by simply drilling boreholes into it, and allowing that gas to either flow out under pressure or be pumped to its destination.

Coal seam and shale gas, on the other hand, are both sources of methane that are trapped in small pockets in underground rock layers, and otherwise referred to as “unconventional” gas.

To release that unconventional gas, those rock strata have to be broken up by hydraulic fracturing, a process more commonly known as 'fracking'. This is achieved by huge diesel driven machines which pump large volumes of water, sand, and chemicals under enormous pressure, which acts like an explosion to smash the underground rock, forcing the sand into the cracks to keep them open to release the gas.

Of course, when rock strata are broken apart, not all the methane finds its way back up the borehole. An unknown, and unmeasurable amount, leaks to the surface and directly into the atmosphere as what are referred to as “fugitive emissions”, adding significantly to the greenhouse effect.

Studies have shown that the carbon emissions produced during the full cycle of seam gas production and use for electricity generation, is possibly even greater than that of mining and burning of coal.

Natural gas resources are relatively long-term and can be serviced by a low number of well heads. Coal seam gas on the other hand, requires hundreds of well heads, all connected by a network of pipelines and roads that can have a huge environmental impact above ground, while the long-term damage to underground water is unknown, and may not become apparent for decades.

Misleading advertising is against the law. Therefore the coal seam gas industry should be forced to come clean, and these

deliberately misleading advertisements should be cut immediately.

Effluent disposal – an unavoidable necessity



Disposing of human effluent is a growing problem along with our ever-swelling population. However, it is something many of us give little thought to, imagining that our sewerage treatment works simply render it safe and conveniently dump it into waterways and offshore in the ocean.

In reality however, there is a significant component that ends up as treated solids which has to be disposed of on land.

Following an unsuccessful attempt two years ago by a Coffs Harbour grease trap sludge removal company to dump its product on a rural property near Halfway Creek, south of Grafton, residents of the area became suspicious of the large number of dump trucks delivering something to another nearby property, and asked the Environment Centre to look into it.

We reported those concerns to Council, which immediately investigated and found that the property was being used to dispose of treated sewerage solids by spreading and then burying them underground.

Below is Council's report to the Centre, which is self-explanatory.

“I refer to your email to Council dated 10th January 2012 and discussions between yourself and Council's Planning Services Coordinator, Ms Heidi Naylor.

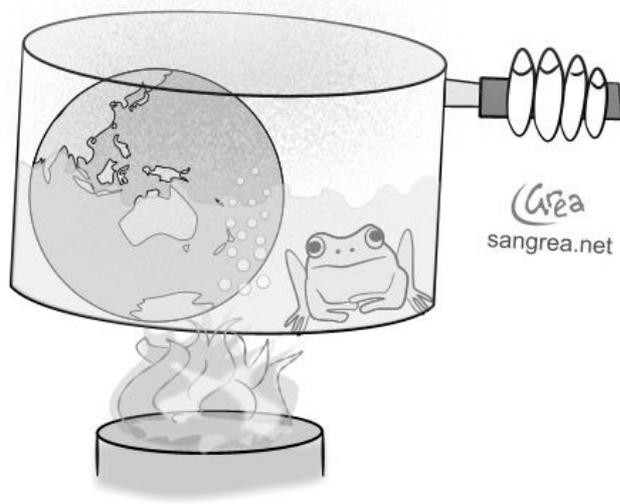
A Council Officer conducted a site inspection of the subject land on 10 January 2012, and confirmed that the contractor was applying Sewerage Treatment Plant biosolids to agricultural land. After researching this matter and in discussion with the contractor and the Environment Protection Authority, Ms Naylor is confident that the contractor is undertaking the application in accordance

with the “NSW Environmental Guidelines: Use and Disposal of Biosolids Products”, and as such, neither development consent nor licencing is required. This has been confirmed with the Environmental Protection Authority.

Further, this activity is being undertaken as a “biosolids resource recovery exemption” under the Protection of the Environment (Waste) Regulation 2008 – General Exemption under Part 6, Clause 51 and 51A.

Presently, the Environmental Protection Authority is considering a review of the Guidelines to address their self-regulatory nature. This particular incidence may serve as an example of community concern that arises where no mandatory reporting of disposal is required to be forwarded to the receiving Council.

The final paragraph highlights what we believe to be core problems with self-regulation, which seldom works, and while the disposal of these “biosolids” in a 'necessary evil', we should encourage the EPA to undertake its considered review and put in place some sort of regulatory framework, along with appropriate compliance monitoring.



All you need to do is boil it slowly

“The Bridge” A Second Crossing of the Clarence River near Grafton



Grafton's historic Clarence River Bridge can no longer cope with traffic volumes

The decision process on where to build a second bridge across the Clarence River near Grafton moves into yet another phase leading, in my opinion, to a predictable outcome which will ultimately become the RTA's preference, not necessarily that of the community.

The Clarence Environment Centre has not had any formal discussion, or formed any preference for any of the latest twenty options put forward last year by the RTA. There were a number of reasons for this including:

- We were too busy with other more pressing concerns and did not consider the bridge decision as a serious environmental issue, and
- Through past experience in dealing with the RTA, which has been considerable, we have come to the conclusion that that Agency views community consultation as a necessary box ticking exercise which it undertakes with no intention of allowing the process to divert it from its charted course. In doing so it deliberately pits various sections of the community against one another in a cynical divide and conquer exercise to achieve its preferred option.

Having said that, social equity is a major part of the Centre's charter, and it has been recognised that the second crossing of the

Clarence River could come at a high social cost, with the preferred alignment, adjacent to and downstream of the existing bridge, resulting in some 40 families being forced from their homes.

This social impact has always been seen by the Centre as unacceptable, as were earlier proposals that placed crossings on and in close proximity to the culturally and environmentally sensitive Susan Island. Those views remain unchanged.

In previous discussions, the Clarence Environment Centre determined that, as the current bridge forms the only link between the Pacific Highway and the Summerland Way, any new structure should ensure the heavy vehicle traffic, that is bound to increase over time, be diverted around the residential areas of Grafton, Junction Hill, and Kulcairn to rejoin the Summerland Way north of the Clarence Way junction.

We believe this bypass must be downstream of Grafton, to allow commuter traffic from the lower river communities of Maclean, Iluka, Yamba, and Gulmarrad (the two latter areas having been identified as 'growth areas' in the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy) to access Grafton from the north via the new bridge.

We do not support any option that imposes additional noise, pollution, or increased heavy traffic on existing residents of Grafton, and believe a separate, dedicated route, should be used across low density residential areas which are currently farmland. As this is flood prone country, the road would, by necessity, have to be carried along a viaduct which would have a lower impact on that prime agricultural land and could allow farming activities to continue beneath it.

We are concerned that, following a single community consultation meeting to discuss the large number of options put forward by the RTA, that one of the 5 short-listed routes that has now been selected for further investigation, was not one of the originals. This new proposal runs very close to the

downstream tip of Susan Island, a highly sensitive cultural site, and an option that the Centre would never support. Apart from the cultural and environmental sensitivities of Susan Island, it should be noted that, due to natural erosive action, the island is slowly 'migrating' downstream, and would eventually move under the proposed bridge.

In short, The Clarence Environment Centre cannot support any new structure being built on, or in close proximity to either Susan or Elizabeth Islands, or along existing residential streets. We believe its main aim to reduce traffic on the existing bridge is best achieved by diverting the large number of down-river commuters, while at the same time lowering heavy vehicle numbers on densely populated urban streets.

The Plantation Debacle

Since the late 1990s, when the Federal Government introduced legislation allowing 100% tax deductions for tree planting, Managed Investment Schemes (MIS) and wood-chip exporters had a field day, as 'buckets' of money poured into the plantation industry.

On the North coast of NSW an estimated 80,000 hectares of land were planted, mainly to Eucalypt species for wood-chip, but also some Swamp Oak and Silky Oak for bio-energy production.

The World Financial Crisis saw an immediate impact on the managed investment plantations as the flow of cash dried up, an impact that saw the three main proponents, Southern Cross Plantations, Forests Enterprises Australia, and Wilmott Timbers file for bankruptcy.

Ecologically, these plantations have been a disaster in this region. Despite strong lobbying by environmentalists, the NSW Department of Primary Industry, headed by ex Minister Ian Macdonald, refused to halt the destruction of native vegetation and old-growth paddock trees to make room for

monocultures of Eucalypts. Copious use of a cocktail of herbicides were routinely used to allow the trees to establish, followed by regular applications of insecticide to combat the insect attacks that are always attracted to large areas of a single species.



Dying Dunns White Gums Upper Kangaroo Creek 2010

With the demise of the plantation owners, concerns that had been highlighted by environmentalists, about the long-term viability of the industry, and the choice of species being grown, became apparent, with the realisation that there was no market for the product. The commonly planted Dunns White Gum, which has no commercial use other than for wood-chip, has suffered widespread dieback and death, and those that have now purchased the land are faced with no option but to dig up the trees and burn them.



The same Kangaroo Creek plantation in 2012, with all trees bulldozed into windrows ready for burning.

It's not only the new owners that are facing this dilemma. Many landowners were persuaded to lease their properties with promises of lucrative payments over 20 years, but have now found themselves with no income, and faced with the expensive task of removing the now worthless, and unsightly

plantations before they can return to regular farming activities.

If the Plantation debacle in NSW has achieved anything, it has highlighted the pathetically inadequate regulations that are in place to ensure compliance with the equally pathetic Code of Practice that is a part of the Plantations and Reafforestation Act.

That Code includes Clause 23 which requires that, in a plantation larger than 30 hectares, “at least 30 native habitat trees must be retained on any given 30 hectares of plantation (where available).” However, the Code then rules that despite subclauses attached to Clause 23, any tree required to be retained under those provisions could be cleared if it was replaced with 10 or 20 new seedlings, depending on the size of the tree removed.

At Upper Kangaroo Creek where the plantation, which had mostly succumbed to dieback and has recently been bulldozed (see above pictures), the landscape had been dotted with numerous habitat trees, and remnant forests, which were all bulldozed to establish the plantations despite vigorous protests from locals.

So were the trees, that the proponents were required to be planted to offset the destruction of those habitat trees, retained? The answer is no, the entire plantation area has now been flattened, with the windrows of timber presumably awaiting burning.

Were those offset trees marked, or their location recorded by the regulatory authority, or was there any requirement by the plantation operator to prepare a site plan to show where those trees were located? Were the new owners made aware of the previous owners' obligations under the Plantations and Reafforestation Act, and were they required to obtain any sort of permission to bulldoze the plantation. Was there even a tally of the destroyed habitat trees in the first instance? We put that question to the regulatory authority.



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We are always looking for suitable material to include in the Newsletter, so if you have anything that you can contribute - an article, poem, photo, cartoon or story, please feel free to send it to the Clarence Environment Centre for inclusion. There is a pigeonhole at the Environment Centre where you can leave your contribution. The Editor



To :