

Northern Rivers Guardians, dedicated to protecting the environment and lifestyles of our region

**President's Report – 2015 – by Sledge** Saturday, November 21 for **2015 AGM**

First, I want to thank all those who helped with our work, especially this year's NRG Committee: Barb Tyler, Rainer Glasker, Joyce and Geoff Morley, Carolyn Rifello, Sharon Boyd, Maria Hagberg, Joanna Gardner and Daniele Voinot. Suzanne Gray has been wonderful posting out *nrg news* via email.

In the lead-up to the world conference on climate change in Paris next month, NRG joins with other groups - both international, national and local - to show that we care. NRG members will be at all regional people's action day gatherings on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November, including Murwillumbah, Lismore, Byron Bay, Lennox Head and Brisbane. The world is at the edge of an historic new age, turning rapidly away from fossil fuels and into new clean technologies.

We at NRG have worked towards a sustainable future – not just for our own region, the Northern Rivers of NSW, but across the country and around the globe. One of our hardest calls is to decide how to be involved in actions that are **not in** the Northern Rivers but which effect this region, such as global climate change.

Biosphere preservation is another such issue as we are all interconnected and the Northern Rivers will not be spared if the world fails to prevent massive species extinctions. Our fate is ultimately bound up with the rest of the planet's ecology. Hence a focus on koala preservation: our interest is not purely to protect the cute and cuddly, but the koala as a "flagship species" that indicates the overall state of the biosystems in which they occur. It is also a "keystone species" in that the failure of this species causes ecosystem collapse. I'm happy to report that koalas now grunt in a rather unmusical manner from trees which Daniele and I planted near the house we built 27 years ago. NRG is involved with local government and other community groups trying to establish biosphere reserves and wildlife conservation corridors throughout our region.

Naturally, we have continued to focus on the threats posed by gas and coal mining. Members have lobbied government at all levels and participated in demonstrations to ensure that the voice of the people is heard. Recent surveys show that more than 90% of North Coast residents want their region to be declared Gasfield free.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November the NSW govt announced that it had reached agreement with gas search company Metagasco to buy out the last 3 licences in our region. When the deal is finalised we will celebrate an historic win for people power. Now we need to get the Northern Rivers officially declared off-limits to coal and gas mining.

Sadly songster Paul Joseph Neilson died from cancer just before this victory. Many will recall his song "Wot the Frack?" and the "No Dam No Way" Youtube video clip produced in collaboration with Mookx Hanley and NRG activists which helped us to save Byrrell Creek. Paul was buried in Nimbin on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015.

NRG is a member organisation of the Gasfield Free Northern Rivers Alliance an extension of Lock The Gate. NRG has donated money both collectively and individually to the making of "The Bentley Effect" film which tells the story of our community resistance to invasive gas mining, whose success will likely inspire other communities around the world to stand up to bullying by big corporations. NRG are also members of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and we were represented by Joanna at the annual NCC conference this year in Bellingen. NRG

collaborates with TweedCAN, Team Koala, Threatened Species Conservation Society and the various Environment Centres, notably the CEC in Murwillumbah and Nimbin EC.

For the coming year we may forecast a continuation of efforts to preserve the koala population, especially at Black Rocks near Pottsville. Likely we will continue to join with other NC residents to oppose any polluting gas mining invasion. The NSW government declared Metgasco has no "social licence" to drill around here. All local candidates for the March 2015 NSW election were at pains to claim they oppose gas mining, and the Nationals narrowly retained Lismore with a promise to buy back petroleum exploration licences and make the NR gasfield free. Mostly this has been done, but no general exclusion zones have been created apart from the horse breeding/ wine growing region of the Hunter Valley. NRG continues to support local communities under threat at Gloucester, Pilliga, Camden, Central Queensland, Kimberley and Central WA, Liverpool Plains, the Hunter and Bylong Valleys. The threat to dwindling water supplies is of vital concern to all. Why are mining companies allowed to draw down aquifers and pollute rivers?

Federal legislation aiming to ban citizens (apart from immediate neighbours) from taken legal action on environmental grounds has so far not succeeded: we will campaign against such short-sighted and divisive regulation. NRG has supported the EDO which successfully brought action against Federal Minister Greg Hunt for approving the foreign-owned Adani company. The company was then given a new approval and it looks like we the people again have to lead the fight to Save the Barrier Reef. If the government is paralysed we have to rely on people power. A people's campaign to divest from fossil fuels/invest in renewable energy convinced banks here and overseas to refuse finance for Adani's proposed coal mine.

During 2015 NRG was instrumental in campaigns to divest from fossil fuel companies with actions at Lismore, Murwillumbah, Tweed/Coolangatta and Burleigh Heads. Since 2008, ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, NAB and Westpac have loaned over \$19 billion to fund fossil fuel projects in Australia. Our members have also participated at the North Coast Energy Forums and NRG has bought into Enova, the first community-owned electricity retailer in Australia. We believe that sustainable options must be promoted at the same time as polluting fossil fuel emissions are stopped. Yes to sustainable technologies, no to fossil fuels. Let's do our part to rein in Climate Change.

NRG has helped members who incurred legal costs during protest action at Bentley and at Maules Creek (a Whitehaven coal mine.) We stand ready to assist residents fight inappropriate developments & to report transgressions anywhere in the region. We have consulted the neighbours of a housing subdivision at Limpinwood. We have made submissions on a number of projects including a motel at Nimbin and a Mens Shed at Pottsville. We continue to make submissions about changes to planning laws.

NRG does not promote any political party but we do advise voters which candidates best reflect our values. Last year, one of our members, Gary Bagnall, served as Mayor for Tweed Shire. This year we congratulate our friend Katie Milne for her election to that role.

Our efforts are sometimes met with success and sometimes not. Efforts to progress towards a more peaceful, sustainable world are likely to be ongoing, a perpetual and epic contest between the greed of self-interest and the wellbeing of our planet.

It may be the fate of humanity always to be tossed between extremes, with no final resolution...ever! It seems likely that activism is the only choice for those of us who want a better world. There may never be a time when good overcomes evil, but with the help of others who care we can counter corporate spin and stop the world from spinning out of control into terminal decline. It may be a journey without final destination, but we travel with fun and righteous companions and that makes all the difference. Thanks to you all for sharing the journey.

The Sledge Award this year goes jointly to Dave Norris and Lynn Dickinson for their dedication to the plight of the koala colony at Black Rocks near Pottsville. Dave and Lynn have been leaders and strong advocates to save these last remaining coastal koalas between Brunswick River and the Queensland border. They organised a public meeting at Pottsville which was well-attended and lively. They organised demonstrations and media events. They have monitored the Sports Field and report regularly and in detail the impacts of human activity there. If the koalas – and other vulnerable species are to exist in the future the community will have Dave and Lynn to thank for it. I thank them both.

Special mention goes to Bruce McQueen who locked onto a coal train near Maule's Creek. He didn't attract the media attention that rugby star David Pocock managed, but Bruce was equally heroic.

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FYI

Dear Scot

EDO NSW has had our second win in court this week for the environment.

Today, the NSW Court of Appeal dismissed Ashton Coal's appeal to overturn a 2014 ruling that required the company to obtain prior permission to access a farm property before expanding its open cut coal mine near Camberwell in the Hunter Valley.

The Hunter Environment Lobby, represented by EDO NSW, successfully defended the coal company's appeal.

Hunter Environment Lobby argued that the conditions laid out in the 2014 decision were an important safeguard for minimising the adverse environmental and social impacts of the mine's expansion.

In the 2014 decision, the Land and Environment Court found that approval could be granted for the mine's expansion, but only on condition that Ashton purchased, leased or gained permission from Mrs Wendy Bowman to access her farm. The property, which would be totally consumed by the mine's expansion, is critical not just for the company to access the coal, but also to properly manage the mine's impacts to ground and surface water. The company cannot compulsorily acquire her land.

Mrs Bowman has lived and farmed in and around the Camberwell area for most of her life. She belongs to the family who settled in the area in the late 1880s and who have been dairy farming there ever since. She has said that she does not intend to sell her property to the mining company.

“This decision reinforces the importance of court-enforced conditions designed to protect our environment,” EDO NSW Principal Solicitor Sue Higginson said. “It’s a timely reminder of how our laws can foster ecologically sustainable development. So often we need our laws to strike a balance between economic and ecological needs.”

Bev Smiles of Hunter Environment Lobby said, “We’re delighted the Court of Appeal has upheld the conditions established by the Land and Environment Court. The condition about Wendy’s property is really important – it shows that communities can have a voice in big developments such as this. We’d like to thank EDO NSW for all their help in securing this decision.”

EDO NSW is grateful to barristers Robert White and Mark Seymour for representing the Hunter Environment Lobby in the Court of Appeal.

More background on this case can be found [here](#).

**Scott, your generous [donation](#) will help us continue to ensure the environment has a fighting chance.**

Thank you again for your support. You make a real difference - we're truly grateful and we're delighted by today's result.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Higginson **Principal Solicitor** EDO NSW