

## **Northern Rivers Guardians President's Report 2016 AGM**

by Scott Sledge

This year (2015-16) **has been full of activity and we have many proud achievements.** Last year's AGM elected me President & Public Officer, Rainer Vice President, Manna Hart Secretary, Geoff Morley Treasurer and Committee Members: Sharon Boyd, Joanna Gardner, Daniele Voinot, Joyce Morley and Bruce McQueen. I want to thank all these good people for their help in maintaining our commitment to protecting the environment and lifestyles of the Northern Rivers.

Manna could not continue as Secretary and we had a vacancy for several months before Bernadine Schwartz stepped up. Thanks to all who served and all who donated time and money, who attended meetings, demonstrations, protests and other activities to assist this organisation to fulfil its purposes. Special thanks to Suzanne Gray who continues to send out the *nrg news* via email and to Daniele who posts items of interest on NRG Facebook page. Also to Rainer and Wayne who keep us up to date via the NRG web site.

Our most high-profile campaigns this year were the struggles to keep this region gasfield free and the protection of koalas under threat at Black Rocks near Pottsville.

I think many of you would have seen yourselves in the recently-released feature film *The Bentley Effect*. I am pleased to say that I was in it. NRG member Richard Deem edited the Kyogle Group against Gas newsletter on behalf of the movement and used his data to compile an excellent history titled *Gasfield Free NSW Northern Rivers: Non-violent, Non-negotiable*. The E-book was published this year on Amazon and now the Gasfield Free Northern Rivers Regional Alliance has sponsored publication as a hard copy limited edition. This book is expected to be available before the end of 2016.

NRG has continued its engagement with the fight against fossil fuels pollution as a member of the LTG Regional Alliance, North Coast Environment Council and Nature Conservation Council.

The NSW government cancelled a licence for Metgasco to drill for gas at Bentley in May of 2014. Several of us went to Sydney to attend the Metgasco AGM in December 2015 and witnessed the company's acceptance of its licence buy-back which effectively resulted in this region becoming gasfield free. We continue to call for the State government to declare the region exempt from gas mining but this has yet to be achieved.

The recent changes laws which affect our right to protest are of serious concern. Some of us went to lock on to the fence at NSW state parliament to protest against these laws in June.

I delivered a petition initiated by Bernadine to the Deputy Premier's office. Ironically, that protest did not result in any arrests.

Efforts to protect the koalas (and other threatened species) in our area focussed mainly on the sports field near Pottsville where certain Tweed Shire Councillors wanted to establish a Men's Shed which would have had negative impacts. Thanks to NRG members led by Dave, Lyn, Menkit and Bernadine the Men's Shed will likely go elsewhere now that a new Council has been elected with a progressive majority.

NRG worked with affiliated group *Tweed Community Voice* to bring about a good result in last month's Council elections, which will mean more support for issues which effect our

objectives.

We say thank you to NRG member, the incumbent Deputy Mayor, Gary Bagnall who did not get enough votes to remain on Council and to Lock the Tweed leader Michael McNamara who also failed to get a seat on the new Council. The remaining 4 of the 6 candidates we supported were elected and we congratulate : Mayor Katie Milne (Greens) Reece Byrnes ( Country Labor) Ron Cooper (Save our Lot 490, Kingscliff) and new Deputy Mayor Christine Cherry (Pottsville Residents Assoc.)

NRG has lobbied MPs at Council, state and Federal level on many issues, including water management without new dams, proposed new laws which would result in loss of native ecological habitats and the obnoxious proposal for a shoddy motel in Nimbin.

**On behalf Of NRG, the President submitted comments for a range of government inquiries, including the Queensland and NSW governments re allowing new coal mines, the proposed changes to NSW laws affecting land clearing, and changes to protest laws in NSW which allow for greater Police powers and harsh penalties for people who interfere with mining.**

**NRG objected to the use of Kyogle area roads for an invasive motorcar race. We favour trains more than new highways and made submissions to the *Access to Transport for Seniors and Disadvantaged People in Rural and Regional NSW Inquiry*. We asked the NSW government for the rail services to be restored and expanded in our region.**

NRG has held meetings every month - except for August 2016 when the President and VP were both away overseas. Our membership stands at more than 600, although the number who attend meeting is considerably less! Once a person has been approved as an NRG member they remain a member unless they resign or are expelled.

Our financial position is solid and NRG was able to buy a Share in **Enova** Community Energy and to invest in other projects compatible with our objectives.

**Sledge Award** : for the member/s who have contributed most to the work of this organisation during the past year: Daniele Voinot for consistant assistance and to Liffy Jack for tireless commitment and supervision of Tweed Shire Council  
I'll conclude with comments from a recent letter from Alison Crook AO, ENOVA Chairperson:

*We have now seen the election of climate change denying Donald Trump in the US. Amongst other things he has stated that he wants to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement. His position on climate change will of course aid the fossil fuel lobbyists and strengthen the hand of those opposed to renewable energy in the Australian government.*

*All this means that we will have to work that much harder at the local and community level, and join with other communities around Australia (and globally) to ensure we reduce greenhouse gases and fight climate change. Or at least reduce its impacts, for the sake of the environment and children everywhere. We can't give up hope.*

Thank you every one. Together we are strong.