

Northern Rivers Guardians President's Report 2017 AGM by Scott Sledge

December 16th 2017 at Mt. Warning Rainforest Park, near Uki.

Last year's AGM elected me President & Public Officer, Rainer Glasker Vice President, Bernadine Schwartz Secretary, Geoff Morley Treasurer and Committee Members:

Wayne White, Joanna Gardner, Daniele Voinot, Joyce Morley, Richard Deem, Bill Fenelon and Carolyn Riffalo. 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.

This year (2016-17) **has been full of activity and we are actively engaged in several key issues**. Thanks to all who stepped up to help: all who donated time and money, who attended meetings, demonstrations, protests and other activities to assist this organisation to fulfill 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.

NRG had a stall at the annual World Environment Day celebrations at Murwillumbah in June, Sustainable Alley at Nimbin Show in September and several markets thru the year. We recently commissioned 250 cloth shopping bags printed with the NRG logo which we sell to help raise our profile and our balance at the Credit Union.

Our most high-profile campaigns this year were the struggles to keep this region free from a threatened boom in water extraction for commercial bottling, the consequences of carbon pollution from the proposed Adani coal mine in Central Queensland and the protection of koalas and other wildlife at Black Rocks and Limpinwood. We have requested funding to help connect habitat for wildlife corridors. If the Hewittville land at Limpinwood can be purchased that could prevent further damage there.

Members have been active at protests and letter-writing, and got issues coverage in the media, especially Menkit, Lyn, Gwyn, Bernadine, Lori and myself - plus Andrew Bennett, who will be mostly resident in Japan for the next 3 years. Dee Nessel has taken on the job of editing submissions and articles members want to send on behalf of NRG. Our work on limiting the effects of music festivals in North Byron has been largely unsuccessful. Our submissions to deny changes to the developer's plans at Kings Forest likewise seemed to have little effect.

On the positive side, NRG endorsed Bill Fenelon as community rep on the Tweed Coast and Waterways Committee (TCWC) and Dave Norris for the Koala Advisory Committee. I am pleased to say both of these were successful.

NRG committee member Richard Deem has compiled an excellent history titled **Gasfield Free NSW Northern Rivers: Non-violent, Non-negotiable**. The E-book was published in 2016 on Amazon and the Gasfield Free Northern Rivers Regional Alliance sponsored publication as a hard copy limited edition. A few copies of this book are still available. 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. We have assisted the formation of a single-issue group named Stop Adani Tweed.

The recent changes to NSW laws which allow landowners to self-assess the conservation value of their land and to decide for themselves whether they will clear native vegetation

has been a focus of our attention and we are advised by the EDO, NCEC and NCC about submissions to the regulations being put into effect. Forest protections are of great importance.

Laws which affect Australians' right to protest are a worry, but the situation looks better now that the High Court has upheld Bob Brown's challenge to anti-protest laws in Tasmania.

Early in the year we tried to protect the koalas (and other threatened species) around the Black Rocks sports field near Pottsville where conservative Tweed Shire Councillors wanted to establish a Men's Shed. NRG sponsored a 'Concert for Koalas' event at Pottsville on 11 March. Efforts by NRG members led by Dave, Lyn, Menkit, Lori, Bernadine and Sophia Fletcher to get the Men's Shed to go elsewhere failed when newly-elected ALP Councillor Reece Byrne deserted the progressive majority and voted to allow the public greater use of the sports field. Tweed MP Geoff Provest provided some compensation by getting the NSW govt to buy 100 hectares of land nearby for the wildlife corridor.

NRG has worked with Tweed Mayor Katie Milne, and Cllrs Ron Cooper, Chris Cherry - and usually Reece Byrnes - to bring about good results in Council decisions, which provided more support for issues which effect our objectives, such as the Council pressure to halt unauthorised logging and roadbuilding in an important wildlife corridor at Limpinwood.

NRG has lobbied MPs at Council, State and Federal levels on many issues, including water management without new dams, new laws which result in loss of native ecological habitats and the obnoxious proposal for a shoddy motel in Nimbin, which now looks unlikely to proceed. We advocated the REAP (Renewable Energy Action Plan) proposed by Greg Reid which was adopted by TSC, now committed to 50% renewable energy by 2025.

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 the over-use of police action against marijuana in north coast areas, especially at Nimbin.

NRG has been involved with efforts by NRRAG to get passenger train services re-instated in a modern form in the Northern Rivers with a connection to Queensland trains. We asked the NSW government for rail services to be restored and expanded in our region. Electric trains such as the commuter service starting in Byron Bay will help reduce pollution and traffic congestion.

NRG has held meetings every month and thank the staff at Mavis' Kitchen for their hospitality and support. Our membership stands at more than 600, although the number who attend meetings 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 holds a Share in **Enova** Community Energy.

We continue to invest in other projects compatible with our objectives.

We have met with various elected officials over the year to lobby for desired outcomes.

Sledge Award : for the member/s who have contributed most to the work of this organisation during the past year: **Dave Norris** and **Lyn Dickinson** who worked valiantly to prevent incursions into the koala habitat at Black Rocks and when that failed, had the courage to get up and start again, on the bigger issue of coal mines proposed by Adani which will damage the GAB and probably destroy the GBR.

Finally, my thanks to every one of you. Together we are strong.