

NRG President's message for 2019 AGM: 21 December 2019

by S. Sledge

*I want to start with words from the School Strike 4 Climate Australia:*

*Nothing about these bushfires is normal. They have been supercharged by climate change, fuelled by the mining and burning of coal and gas, enabled by our Federal Government. Yet, as flames and smoke damage people's health, homes and work, our Prime Minister is nowhere to be seen. All Scott Morrison has to offer are his thoughts, prayers and more coal and gas.*

*In fact, just yesterday, Morrison said that firefighters want to be on the frontline fighting these fires, and they don't need more support. According to him, our Government's actions: "on climate change are getting the results they're intended to get." "...Our world is on fire and desperately needs each of us to step up and take action. Sadly, this crisis is only going to get more intense over the summer and the years to come. We are breathing in climate injustice on a daily basis now. But all of us can breathe out with courageous and compassionate action. There is still a window of time to avert the worst of this crisis, but we all need to act now."*

NRG proudly has membership of the North East Forests Alliance (NEFA). 10 days ago NEFA President Dailan Pugh said: "We have these mega fires that are moving across the landscape. The biggest difference (from past forests fires) is we're not getting much landscape left unburned or fauna refuges left..."

"An expert workshop in 2012 estimated that Koala populations on the north coast had declined by 50% in the past 20 years, leaving an extant population of around 8,400 Koalas. It is likely that thousands of these now have been killed, with many populations now on the verge of collapse. "In just one fire season, which is not over yet, thousands of koalas have lost their homes, and most of these are likely to have died. These fires have greatly compounded the plight of Koalas and driven them, and numerous other species, further towards extinction.

"If we want to give Koalas a chance to survive this unfolding catastrophe then a logging moratorium must immediately be placed upon all potential Koala habitat in order to allow burnt (scorched) feed trees a chance to recover, and to protect the remaining intact refuges essential as source areas for re-colonisation", Mr. Pugh said.

We must demand an immediate moratorium on logging of native forests until the bushfire crisis is over and the extent of the damage to koala populations and their habitat is fully understood. NRG has joined the chorus demanding action to protect native forests and wildlife. On 18<sup>th</sup> December we received a reply from Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier Ray Williams, MP, who informed that the NSW government is "taking decisive action to protect koalas" and has allocated more than \$350 M to the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust. Let's hope that this money will actually go to protect koala population hubs and not go into the pockets of Coalition members who want to sell land which has no

living koalas and no suitable food trees. The government has not yet committed to establishing a Great Koala National Park in the forests around Bellingen.

Members helped NEFA defend the state forest at Gibberagee near Whiporie and are ready to go stand with the protectors of the Kalang headwaters forests near Bellingen .

**Yesterday I got an email which read : “We need national leadership and a coordinated response to cope with more intense and frequent extreme weather events.** The Coalition Government must accept that climate change is fuelling the worsening bushfire conditions, develop a plan to urgently phase out fossil fuels and work with us to keep Australians safe. ...”

What does it take to get the ADF into action? Do we have to wait for foreign invasion? Why not require Forestry Corp to protect the trees from fire instead of swooping in like vultures as soon as they can to cut them down? National Parks gets criticised for failing to maintain fire trails, but their budget has been drastically cut. The responsibility for stopping fires has been entirely thrust onto the RFS and their volunteers with limited equipment. At a recent meeting in Nimbin government reps told community organisations that govt can only help in “the recovery phase” after the fires have done their damage. Seems to me like Humpty Dumpty after his fall: “All the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty together again.” And no thought was expressed at all about protecting wild life or the general environment or preventing disaster ahead of the events .

During this year NRG worked with like -minded groups to effect our objectives: we are members of umbrella organisations such as NEFA, and the Nature Conservation Council. We donated to the Environmental Defenders Office and to the Stop Adani movement. With the Tweed Water Alliance and the Water Dragons, we support protection of aquifers and waterways against greedy water extraction, especially for bottling. NRG has combined with Nimbin Environment Centre on a number of occasions such as a forests info nite at Nimbin , stalls at World Environment Day, the Channon Markets and the Nimbin Show. We support the objectives and activities of the Caldera Environment Centre, Friends of the Koala and the Threatened Species Conservation Society. We have supported Trains on our Tracks (TOOT), Schools Strike for Climate (SS4C) and Extinction Rebellion (XR.) We helped organise public showings of the documentary film “*Burned ...are Trees the new Coal.*”

As petrol heads from Queensland have returned with their hands out for public money to subsidise the Border Ranges Rally, we appealed to Kyogle Council to turn them away, without success.

We also stood with local residents and environmentalists opposed to establishment of a massive festival ground at North Byron Parklands, also without success.

We did succeed at raising awareness of forests being cut down and burned to make electricity. We have not yet stopped it from happening, vis Condong and Broadwater.

We support Lock the Gate: NRG has lobbied for legislation proposed by Independent MLC Justin Field : An Act to amend the Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991 to impose a moratorium on the prospecting for, or the mining of, coal seam gas in New South Wales and to reintroduce the public interest as a ground for certain decisions relating to petroleum titles; and for related purposes. This would effectively stop CSG development in the Pillaga. The Bill awaits scheduling for 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading Debate in the NSW Parliament.

NRG members write letters to decision-makers and to news media. Bernadine has a monthly column in the Nimbin Good Times . Marion had articles published about the effects of burning trees to make electricity. Our Secretary Denise is adept at editing when asked to look over our texts.

One of our most prolific writers this year has been so effective we recently learned that some TSC officers are banned from entering into discussion with our Gwyn Hooper. For that and other reasons I believe Gwyn deserves to receive the **Sledge Award** for this year. Thanks Gwyn, and to all other Committee people. thanks to all those who worked to protect our community and the beautiful places where we live. You know who you are and what you have done. Our work in the coming year will likely not be easy. We will not give up.

Since July, wildfires have burned over 1.6 million hectares of north east NSW bioregion and NEFA estimates a loss of over 2,000 koalas in the north coast.

We call on the NSW Government for an immediate moratorium on logging of koala habitat.