

NRG President's Report for 2021 AGM

By S. Sledge, at Murwillumbah CWA Hall

18 December 2021

Greetings,

We have survived another year and recognise that the land we meet on was never ceded by its Aboriginal owners and pay our respects to their elders and traditional custodians.

Despite the COVID 19 pandemic there is much to celebrate: all the nations of the world met at Glasgow, Scotland, for serious consideration of the intense situation we face due to climate change. It is about time humanity recognised we are the main cause of this problem and that urgent action is needed to change our destructive ways if we want the planet to continue as the amazingly bio-diverse place we live upon.

You might have noticed that in this month's *Nimbin Good Times* the NEC column I write (page 7) says, "At the COP26 in Glasgow, most of the world agreed to stop deforestation, yet Australia is already renegeing on its pledge to protect forests. ... The solution is simple: Timber plantations can supply our needs, and the waste from those operations can nourish the soil for future trees."

NRG has worked with North East Forest Alliance (NEFA), which includes North Coast Environment Council (NCEC), in using mobile phone technology to record the presence of koalas, a species in danger of becoming locally extinct. In the past, forestry officers would walk through state forests and say, "We didn't find any threatened species ... no koalas." It's a kind of don't-look-don't-find strategy that facilitates logging but undermines confidence that governments will protect our ecology. Actually, at this point, state-sponsored logging of public native forests should simply be outlawed. The colonialist mentality of taking whatever is most useful and sending the rest to be burned for electricity is shameful. We can grow what wood we need on plantations and leave to Nature what little survives of our forests.

Loggers have been stopped by environmental activists in the public forest called Cherry Tree near Mallanganee, west of Casino. Four protestors were arrested when they refused to move aside to allow logging equipment access to a high-value conservation area. Jim Morrison (not the singer) is an ecologist who lives nearby. He says that the Cherry Tree State Forest area has a wide range of rare and endangered species. It must have protection from logging as it is one of the few forests not severely damaged by the enormous fires 2 years ago, which wiped out much of our North Coast forest ecology.

We are Guardians of the Northern Rivers, but our scope of action is much wider. We are members of The North Coast Environment Council (NCEC) and the Northeast Forest Alliance (NEFA) and the state-wide Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) whose focus is to phase out coal and other fossil fuels and switch to clean energy.

We contribute to various causes such as the Stop Adani movement, Lock the Gate Alliance, Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) and Biomass Action Group (BAG).

Recently we organised a media event to alert our region to the continuing use of biomass to generate electricity at Condong and Broadwater. Instead of burning bagasse to provide co-generation of electricity for the local sugar millers, the foreign-owned company trucks in forest “waste” from all over the North Coast and now proposes to bring “builders’ waste” from SE Queensland to burn at Condong. Imagine what could be in that! Mandy Nolan, Ian Gaillard, and Nola Firth addressed the October gathering at Condong.

The NSW government is trying to construct a “toxic waste incinerator” at Casino, and the Council there so far sees no problems with polluting their atmosphere or even their food. Sydney residents don’t want it so their waste will come to us for burning. This could end up a protest as big as Bentley.

NRG serves as a point where people can come with problems. Recently, a drawn-out battle to develop land in the upper Tweed valley west of Uki, which some of us called Nightmare Village, re-emerged in a phoenix scheme that threatened to replace the quiet lives of rural residents with up to 800 new houses (392 dwellings in the first phase and a village of the same density in a later phase). We called a public meeting to reveal the scheme’s intentions with Tweed Mayor Chris Cherry among the speakers. Despite COVID restrictions we had a full house. I believe that the publicity generated (which included local and national TV news) shook the government, and the development application was refused.

Groups like the movement to save the Casino to Mur’bah rail corridor have come to us for help organising meetings and market stalls and use of our insurance, which we share costs with the state umbrella organisation NCC.

We will continue to cooperate with various like-minded groups, such as the Kyogle Environment Group (KEG) and Caldera Environment Centre (CEC). We shared a stall with Nimbin Environment Centre (NEC) for World Environment Day, which staged in Mur’bah again in June this year after being cancelled due to COVID last year. We had a very successful raffle to help us pay our costs.

We were approached by the Tweed Regional Museum at Mur'bah for help with a display about protest action in the district, and we may visit it now to remind ourselves of No Rally Group origins—residents reacting to having a road race imposed on our region in 2009 by power-hungry politicians and international fossil fuel fools. There are other issue-based displays too, all very well presented. The temporary display called “*Fight for the Right*” is open from 10 to 4 Tuesdays to Saturdays probably until 29th January. Curator Erica Taylor has asked if we will donate some of the material for their archives. For more information, see the museum's website: <https://museum.tweed.nsw.gov.au/>

Twelve years later, NRG is still agitating for better planning. This year we lobbied for greater koala protection and secured state government funding for an extension of the Cudgen Nature Reserve near Casuarina. We call this *Protecting the Future Today*.

We are currently confronting issues on the North Coast, notably the issues around public transport and homelessness, landclearing and nature conservation. Mur'bah residents have **not** been consulted about a state government scheme to amalgamate all primary and secondary schools into one mega-campus. In this month's elections 5 groups with NRG members nominated for Tweed Council. Committee member Bill Fenelon headed a Group with Rainer Glasker, Cas Rifello, and Susan Greer that campaigned mainly for dual-use of the rail corridor. Member Nola Firth took over the top spot from Katie Milne on the Greens ticket, which included members Joanna Gardner and Trish Mann. Letitia Kelly had Lori Scinto and Marian Van Gestel in her group. We recruited Meredith Dennis to join NRG, and she was supported by various members including member and former Counsellor Gary Bagnall. We will learn next week whether we have succeeded in gaining a majority on Council for progressive candidates recommended by our election committee called *Community Voice*.

I thank the membership for their efforts in the democratic election process and especially the NRG Committee: Marian, Daniele, Bill, Wayne, Geoff and Joyce, our Vice President Gwyn, our Treasurer Rainer, and perhaps the hardest worker of all our marvellous Secretary Dee. She merits the *Sledge Award* for the second year in a row. To that award certificate for the member who has done most this year to advance our aims, I add this NRG tee shirt to honour her service.

Thanks, Dee, and thank you every one.

Sledge
President