

NRG President's Report – AGM 21 December 2024

by Scott Sledge

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters of Australia. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodians past, present, and emerging.

Northern Rivers Guardians Inc celebrates our involvement in the umbrella environment group Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales (NCC) in our advocacy work speaking up for NSW's forests, rivers, wetlands and wildlife.

NCC's CEO Jaqui Mumford wrote: "Advocacy is a vital part of the ecology of the environment movement. If we can secure positive changes to how nature is protected, that change then ripples throughout the whole of NSW."

NCC works to protect and restore coastal wetlands in NSW. In this campaign's first year they have:

- Met with conservationists, Traditional Owners and community organisers on the NSW North Coast, to form a strategic alliance and exert pressure for changes to wetlands protection and management at the state level.
- Secured policy change to ensure water pumping extraction limits are based on the logical requirements of the rivers and wetlands and consider climate change, through our water and climate court case against the NSW Government.
- Created wetlands mapping that shows the extent of wetlands in NSW loss since ecocolonisation. This is an interactive visual tool that shows the true extent of the decline in wetlands ecologies throughout the state – some catchments have lost of 75% of their wetlands.

* *The World Wildlife Fund State of the Planet 2024 indicates we have lost 70% of our wildlife and need to do much more to preserve habitats and introduce more sustainable practices.*

Forest News. NRG has devoted considerable energy towards preserving native forest ecosystems.

- a. Victoria and WA stopped logging of native forests last year, which is encouraging despite NSW government's reluctance to stand up for nature.
- b. David Heilpern's opinion piece in *The Echo* is an excellent commentary on the NSW government's ephemeral pledge to establish the Great Koala National Park: <https://www.echo.net.au/2024/01/as-if-chris-minns-wrote-it/>
- c. Some members attended meetings of Fridays4Forests in Lismore and Nimbin. A March in March protest was held in Lismore on 24 March. Hundreds of residents marched including NRG members which increased pressure on government to stop logging in native forests. Another focus was to protest the logging in the Richmond Range that was scheduled to begin in April. F4F has started a Murwillumbah branch in December and should continue in 2025.
- d. Despite our support, NEFA lost its court case against arbitrary renewal of Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs) The judge said the decision on renewing forestry agreements was a political/administrative matter, not a legal matter. Here's the link: <http://tinyurl.com/3f3dza6c>

- e. Mark Graham had a win in court where he appeared as a witness, in handcuffs. The video viewed in court showed Mark Graham and his mate being assaulted by forestry contractors, which was the opposite of what the contractors and Police had maintained.
- f. South East Forest Rescue is seeking an injunction against Forestry Corp because Forestry Corp is not doing the required monitoring before going in to log.

Protecting Ecology. NSW's nature laws have been failing to protect nature for far too long. The NSW Labor Government was elected carrying a promise to 'end runaway habitat clearing' and fix biodiversity offsets. This year NCC co-ordinated the Alliance for Nature NSW – a network of organisations working to multiply our impact and fighting for law reform to address runaway habitat clearing.

Clarrie Hall Dam. Council invited community response to its proposal to raise the dam wall to increase the capacity of the dam, which will allow for more storage. See Tweed Council's website for more information. Consultation is now complete. Should the proposal to raise Clarrie Hall Dam gain all the necessary NSW and Australian Government approvals, and the elected Tweed Shire Council decides to proceed, construction is expected to start in late 2026.

Climate Change Summit. A Climate Change Summit, which will include a climate action group, will be held in Tweed Shire in February. Council has done a risk analysis and will present an agenda for future activities. Join the Community Action Climate Group here: <https://www.yoursaytweed.com.au/community-climate-action-group> (NOTE: Expressions of interest close on 10 January 2025.)

Tarkine Forest. This forest in Tasmania is under threat of logging. Violet Coco produced a good video about this and asked for donations to the support further actions: NRG donated \$400 from the legal fund.

Nightcap on Minjungbal Update. The proponents had until 23 June to appeal the decision by the L&E court that upheld Tweed Shire Council's refusal of their DA, noting that the development is not permissible under the Tweed LEP. The proponents asked for an extension of time to lodge an appeal. This was rejected, and, according to David Vincent, who has been following the case closely, the proponents' lawyers withdrew from the case. As the case was finally dismissed, the development cannot proceed because it is not permissible, and that should be the end of it.

Wallum Estate. This planned housing development at Omega Circus near Brunswick Heads has several environmental issues. NRG wrote to authorities, including Tanya Plibersek, asking for the threatened ecological community to be protected under the EPBC Federal law. We also made a financial donation to the Save Wallum legal fund. The **Save Wallum** group achieved a temporary halt to the development thru a court injunction, and that may become a permanent injunction in the coming year.

Council Elections. We devoted considerable meeting time to the September elections, in particular the need to find Tweed Council candidates for NRG to support along with glorious incumbents Chris, Meredith, and Nola.

We agreed that NRG and the Caldera Environment Centre (CEC) would work together on election activities and also agreed that the *Community Voice* flyer we put out this year would

be a simpler design than the one we used last time. CEC funded two full-page ads just before the election for CEC and NRG's Community Voice to showcase the candidates we support.

The election results in the region were mixed. Tweed remained much the same, with 6 of the 7 Councillors re-elected and Kimberley Hone replacing Warren Polglase to rep for the Nationals. Byron Shire elected a Greens Mayor and an additional three Greens councillors, so four of Byron's nine councillors are Greens. Kyogle now has a progressive council, with four new progressive members among the nine Councillors. Lismore retained the National Party Mayor and a clear majority on Council over the two ALP and two Greens Councillors, which now includes Virginia Waters from Nimbin.

Donations. In January, NRG donated \$400 from its legal fund to Save Swift Parrots. In May, we donated \$400 to the EDO and \$400 to Ben Penning's legal defence against Adani. In October, we donated \$500 to the Save Wallum legal fund, and in December, we voted to send another \$500 to the EDO.

In Memorium. **Wayne White**, long time NRG Committee member and our internet webmaster, died in July of this year after a short stay at the Wedgtail Hospice. He will be greatly missed.

Also, forests activist **Malveena Martyn** died this year and was farewelled at Hanging Rock Hall in October.

Changes. Due to closing their business, the owners of Mavis Kitchen ceased to offer us a free meeting place, so we moved to the Murwillumbah RSL for our monthly meetings this year and shifted our meeting time to 11am to 1 pm on the third Saturday of each month.

Because the CEC decided it could not manage to produce their usual World Environment Day event this Winter, NRG decided to appeal to members for donations, instead of running our usual raffle. Memberships and Donations totalled \$332.00 in response to an NRG email appeal that went out in July. This was gratifying but was not enough to cover our NCC membership and Insurance, which totalled \$ 650 in July this year.

Finally, I want to express my great appreciation for those that continued to support Northern Rivers Guardians by coming to meetings, reading our emails, and attending our events, even the gathering to support forests in front of Justine Elliot's South Tweed office. We are so scary, apparently, that our Federal Member of Parliament locked the office doors and papered over the windows so nothing could be seen inside.

Our Committee this year consisted of Daniele, Susan, Gwyn, Marian, and Wayne until his death. Our Treasurer was Rainer, and Secretary Dee. I served as President, ably supported by Cas as VP. Each one deserves our thanks. I will be glad if we can continue in this fashion.