



VALLEY WATCH INC

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Creating a sustainable future

President's Report to AGM - September 3, 2011

Valley Watch's Mission Statement is *To advocate for a healthy and biologically diverse environment and preserve the quality of life of the Clarence Valley.* In the last twelve months we have continued to fulfil that role. Our advocacy has included:

ACTION

Lawrence Subdivision

We successfully organised dozens of letters in opposition to a 35 lot subdivision in Lawrence and made a strong submission ourselves, and the application was withdrawn.

World Forests Day Protest March 21

Six of our members travelled to Grafton to join a protest rally highlighting the lack of progress in resolving problems with forestry regulation and Ros Woodward, dressed in a koala costume, presented a list of demands on behalf of the protesters to the head of DECCW's Private Native Forestry Unit.

Concrete batching plant, James Creek

You don't win them all. Having successfully opposed the concrete batching plant in James Creek initially, we were disappointed that council, on legal advice, determined that existing use rights applied. However our scrutiny ensured rigorous safety measures against pollution of James Creek were in place.

EDUCATION

Education re climate change

Through the newsletter we presented the Worldwide Fund for Nature's Living Planet Report, we presented an article arguing that the extreme weather seen worldwide at the beginning of 2011 was associated with climate change, and we promoted Earth Hour on March 26.

Education re sustainability

Through the newsletter we presented articles on battery recycling, the Savewater Alliance, the importance of recycling aluminium cans, the death toll plastic causes to our waterways and wildlife, and we promoted Clean Up Australia Day on March 6.

Education re conservation

Through the newsletter we supported CVCIA – Clarence Valley Conservation in Action – in its activities regarding cane toads and Common (Indian) Mynas

Education re coal seam gas mining (Lock the Gate) and antimony mining

Through the newsletter we presented articles on coal seam gas mining in the Clarence and Richmond valleys and on antimony mining on Dorrigo Plateau which threatens the valley's water supply. As a result Valley Watch joined the Lock the Gate Alliance, attended an EDO forum on CSG mining in

Grafton and wrote letters to Ministers Hartcher and Hazzard, local member Steve Cansdell and all CVC councillors expressing our concerns.

SUBMISSIONS

Koala Plan of Management

In 2008 Valley Watch began pressuring the new amalgamated Council to finalise its Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management. It was a big step forward but needed to be stronger, and through the work of Cath Clark in particular Valley Watch made a substantial submission which was largely accepted by Council.

There was a subsequent attempt to exempt Woombah from its provisions, but knowing of Valley Watch's interest and expertise, Cr Ian Tiley sought our assistance and the exemption was not granted.

Clarence diversion

Valley Watch made a formal submission to the Standing Committee on Regional Australia opposing any attempts to divert any Clarence River water westwards. Ours was one of the first of 643 submissions. It challenged the view that water flowing out to sea is wasted and argued that the health of the river depends on keeping the river flows within the catchment to fulfil their vital ecological role.

Flying foxes

Linda Wright has been a wonderful Valley Watch representative on the Maclean Flying-fox Working Group and she prepared a great submission on our behalf. Local politicians interfered with the strategy the working group had developed and there has been substantial removal of trees around the High School, quaintly called "habitat modification".

Valley Watch wrote to every Senator regarding Luke Hartsuyker's Private Member's Bill and we have written a letter of support for a Lands Department grant application for restoration and rehabilitation of the rainforest reserve. To present a positive view of flying foxes we donated a copy of *Stellaluna* – the story of a baby fruit-bat raised in a nest of three baby birds – to each primary school in the lower Clarence from Tucabia to Iluka. The response from the schools was most encouraging.

Unexplained clearings

Valley Watch reported to Council two instances of unauthorised clearing at Gulmarrad and West Yamba and in both cases were successful in having the work stopped and restoration enforced.

Wooloweyah Draft Fire Protection Strategy

We presented to the Rural Fire Service a substantial and thorough submission on this strategy pointing out weaknesses and suggesting amendments designed to retain the high biodiversity values of the village.

Native vegetation

Valley Watch also prepared a submission regarding an amendment to Council's Development Control Plan which, among other things, would have allowed clearing within 20 metres

of a "legal building" with no necessity for a permit. Individual members also made submissions – thank you. When it came before Council both Vice-President Athena and Secretary Ronny addressed the meeting opposing this, and Cr Ian Tiley moved that the existing restrictions in the former Maclean Shire remain, with the 20m limit applying to those areas where there was no restriction. Cr Sue Hughes moved an amendment to reduce the area to 10 metres, and the amended motion was carried unanimously by Council – a huge win.

OTHER MATTERS

20th anniversary dinner

One of the highlights of the year was our 20th anniversary dinner with guest speaker Ian Cohen. More than 40 Valley Watch members had a great night, and Councillors Sue Hughes, Margaret McKenna, Karen Toms and Mayor Richie Williamson had their eyes opened to the sterling work Valley Watch does. Ian Cohen stressed the importance of local groups keeping a watchful eye on development in the valley and on the operations of Council and paid tribute to our achievements over twenty years.

Market

Under the leadership of our market coordinator Ros Woodward we have had a presence at most markets in the last twelve months except when weather or illness intervened. The displays attract interest from the passers by and our raffle and book sales help with our income. The committee has decided to be more active in coming months in recruiting new members – that's why we've reduced the membership fee to a mere \$5.00. Stop by and say g'day – we'd love to see you.

Council watch

When Council meets in Maclean we usually have Ronny and/or Athena present in the gallery, sometimes speaking but always letting Councillors know they are being observed. I'm pleased to say we have a good relationship with the Councillors which means, when we are critical of their decisions, we are not dismissed as a mob of whingers but are listened to with respect.

Australia Day Award

Valley Watch was nominated for an Australia Day award as a community organisation. Although the winner was the Osprey Day Club it was heartening to receive the recognition. As a member of the Australia Day Committee (though not voting on this award!) I can tell you that the committee was very impressed by the nomination.

Council Committees

Speaking of Committees, Valley Watch is represented on Council's Climate Change Advisory Committee, the Coast and Estuary Management Committee and the Water Efficiency Team. Valley Watch gains useful and early information from these committees and is able to make constructive contributions.

Other organisations

We are also part of an Inter-Group Biodiversity Steering Committee covering the whole Valley – thank you Ros and Helen T. for your willingness there. We also belong to the North Coast Environment Council, and Ros represented us at the NSW Coastal Conference in Batemans Bay last November.

Website archived at State Library

We were a little surprised to receive this email from the State Library of NSW:

“The State Library of NSW is committed to preserving selected websites of lasting cultural value for long-term access by the Australian community. Only a relatively small number of websites are assessed as being significant enough for PANDORA and we would be grateful if you would allow us to include yours.”

But when they say such nice things about you, how can you refuse? Thank you Ronny for being our Web Coordinator and keeping it up to date.

Reminder – succession planning

Twelve months ago I said I would take this position for a maximum of two years. That means this time next year there needs to be somebody ready to take on the position of President. I will not be changing my mind – so start thinking about taking the helm for a couple of years.

I want to conclude by saying thank you to a number of people. First of all I want to thank the wonderful committee I am privileged to work with - Athena, Barbara, Carolyn, David, Gary B., Ronny and Ros.

Then I want to thank our submission writers who spend many hours in research and writing to present strong submissions. Advocacy requires more than mere assertion, and the quality of the Valley Watch submissions is always of the highest standard.

Next our Market workers - John Batcheldor for always being so willing to help set up and pack away, Ros for her great displays, and all those who help to staff the stall. As well as Committee members Athena, Carolyn and Ronny we have great support from Grant and Imelda Jennings, Helen Tyas Tunggal and Robyn Cumming. And thank you to Hec and Jill Doughty for storing our trailer!

Finally I want to thank our many members. Our strength is in our numbers and our unity of purpose, and we would not be the effective group that we are without your support.

Gary

COMMITTEE 2011-2012

Cath Clark acted as Returning Officer at the AGM. All the outgoing Committee members were re-elected and we are delighted to welcome back to the Committee Imelda Jennings. Imelda took a break to concentrate on Wildlife SOS and the Maclean Flying-fox Working Group. Her keen mind and wise counsel will be much appreciated.

FEES 2011-2012

Membership fees for 2011-2012 are now due. The fee is now only \$5.00, so we need you to renew your membership if you have not done so already. A membership renewal form accompanies this newsletter. You can post your renewal to us or just drop it in at the Valley Watch stall at the Yamba Market (September 25).

CURRY IN A HURRY

Following the AGM, members stayed on for a quick meal and a chat. With some appropriate Indian music playing quietly in the background we shared some yummy food - two vegetarian curries and one beef curry, rice and side dishes of pappadums, cucumber and yogurt raita and mango chutney. Thank you to Athena, Barb, Carolyn, Ronny and David for your contributions.

The Committee has not yet met to make a decision, but I'd like to see the AGM + Curry in a Hurry become an annual event on the first Saturday of each September - meeting at 5.30, finished by 7.00!

YAMBA MARKET

Once again I'm asking for your help with the Valley Watch stall at the Yamba Market.

We set up the gazebo and the display from 7.00 am and we don't pack up until after 1.00 pm, which makes Market Day a bit daunting unless we have support. So here's what you can do:

- Help on the stall for an hour or two.
- Give us books and magazines for the stall.

If you can give us some time on the stall, it would help if we knew in advance so we can organise some sort of roster. Just leave a message on the Valley Watch phone 0488 979 196. We have a good time there together - you would enjoy it!

The stall is our major fundraiser, and now that we've reduced the membership fee we need to work even harder to raise money. We always have a beautiful orchid to raffle (thanks to the generosity of Frogs Hollow), but we need more books and magazines. We usually give away the magazines, so any like *Australian Geographic* or *Ecos* or *Habitat* are particularly good for raising awareness.

Good books - especially novels - are always in demand. Why not make some space on your bookshelves by giving us some of the books you won't read again? We would really appreciate it.

Your Committee	
President:	Gary Whale
Vice-President:	Athena Batcheldor
Secretary:	Ronwyn Lopez
Treasurer:	David Lopez
Committee:	Gary Brisbane Carolyn Jeckeln Imelda Jennings Barbara Whale Ros Woodward