



## VALLEY WATCH INC

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Creating a sustainable future

## A win for native vegetation

Members will recall that back in April I urged members to make submissions to Council opposing a proposed amendment to the LEP which would have allowed greater clearing of native vegetation.

I am pleased to report that at the Council Meeting of June 14 a greatly improved amendment was passed thanks largely to the great response from Valley Watch members.

Valley Watch Secretary Ronny Lopez and Past President Athena Batcheldor both addressed the meeting. Below is an article by Ronny about what transpired.

### A win for preservation

An Officer's report to Clarence Valley Council on Tuesday 14th June recommended a change to the draft Local Environment Plan (LEP) to allow the clearing of vegetation and understorey 20 metres from a building without requiring a permit.

The Officer's report argued that because the majority of villages and towns had no previous control, introducing a blanket distance of 20 metres to every area would be 'improving control'.

This defied logic. In a diverse area such as ours, some areas need more control, others less; residential areas such as Ashby Woombah and Gulmarrad are very different from urban areas such as Yamba, Maclean and Grafton.

Clearing for 20 metres around a dwelling measuring 15 m x 15 m (the size of the average Australian home) would allow for clearing of over 2000 m<sup>2</sup> of vegetation.

Valley Watch's regular Council observer, Ronwyn Lopez, spoke at the meeting pointing out that the proposed amendment negated Council's objectives of controls for the protection of native vegetation including:

- to provide a framework for the protection of native vegetation in residential zones;
- to protect and enhance the environmental amenity, special landscape characteristics, unique vegetation qualities and ecological values of the Valley;
- to protect biodiversity in accordance with Council's Biodiversity Management strategy 2010; and
- to enable clearing native vegetation to the minimum extent necessary to ensure reasonable levels of safety to human life and property.

*In evaluating a request for removal of vegetation, Council is required to evaluate ..... whether the removal of trees:*

- will reduce the habitat (nesting tree or roosting tree) for any threatened fauna species;
- will adversely affect any riparian corridor and/or wildlife corridor

- will cause any potential adverse slope instability or geotechnical impacts upon the site or the locality;
- will threaten an endangered population, endangered ecological community or critical habitat for any threatened fauna species.

Ronwyn expressed Valley Watch's concern that large scale clearing would occur without any evaluation of vegetation, causing loss of habitat, amenity, slope instability and destroying the unique characteristics of the Clarence Valley.

She also asked what had been the point of the Council's excellent Koala Management Plan when this recommendation would allow clear felling of trees which may be koala habitat.

The meeting was also addressed by Wooloweyah residents Athena Batcheldor and Gillian Lowbridge who gave excellent presentations as to why the areas needed protection.

Councillors had before them 15 submissions, 11 of which opposed the proposed amendment including Valley Watch's own submission and 6 more from Valley Watch members, as well as a detailed submission from our friend John Edwards of the Clarence Environment Centre.

The chair of CVC's Biodiversity Committee, Councillor Ian Tiley, advised the meeting that the proposed amendment had **not** been presented by Officers to that Committee for consideration despite it being an important part of developing the biodiversity strategy.

Councillor Tiley moved that the existing controls in the Maclean LEP (which will become obsolete with the adoption of the new LEP) remain and areas that previously had no control be covered under the new proposal.

Councillor Margaret McKenna moved an amendment to reduce the distance allowed for clearing without a permit to 10 metres. Councillor Tiley accepted this and the motion was carried by Council unanimously.

While Valley Watch's ideal scenario would be to have a permit required for the removal of any native vegetation, this was a huge win, and we congratulate and thank the Councillors for their support in preserving much of our very special biodiversity habitat.

– Ronwyn Lopez

### **Mining at Wild Cattle Creek**

Last month I made mention of a forum to be held in Dorrigo on May 15 arranged by DEW – Dorrigo Environment Watch – on the subject of antimony mining in Wild Cattle Creek, part of the catchment of the Clarence River.

Barb and I had registered to attend and had booked our accommodation when we told the forum had been cancelled because the government agencies were "unable to be present".

One can't help but wonder if a change of government in NSW on April 26 had anything to do with it!



### **More on Coal Seam Gas**

Did you see on the news that massive protest against Coal Seam Gas on May 29 at Byron Bay? Over 1500 people stood on Main Beach to form the letters "NO CSG", according to the *Northern Star* of May 30.

There seems little doubt that CSG Mining is going to become a major issue both on the North Coast and across Australia.

The meeting at South Grafton Ex-Servicemen's Club on Thursday May 19 was amazed to learn from Sue Higginson, senior solicitor for the Northern Rivers Environmental Defender's Office, that landholders have very few rights when it comes to mining on their property.

"Private landholders don't have too many rights, certainly no power of veto," she said. "They can be forced to arbitration to negotiate a deal."

It seems there is no necessity for consultation in the 1991 legislation governing CSG exploration, which is at odds with best practice for developing activities with land use impacts on that scale.

Valley Watch has joined the Lock the Gate Alliance Inc and is one of 90 participating groups - see <http://www.lockthegate.org.au>

#### **Your Committee**

<b>President:</b>	Gary Whale
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Athena Batcheldor
<b>Secretary:</b>	Ronwyn Lopez
<b>Treasurer:</b>	David Lopez
<b>Committee:</b>	Gary Brisbane Carolyn Jeckeln Barbara Whale Ros Woodward

### **Valley Watch STILL Needs Your Help**

Last month I made an appeal for help at the Yamba Market and invited members to call in to our Valley Watch stall at least to say hello.

I must admit that the weather was lousy, so it was little surprise that nobody came by – but the 'faithful' were still there despite the rain and the cold.

Apart from some extra helpers we need donations of books and magazines (in good condition, of course). We give the magazines away – so any with a nature or environmental slant, like *Habitat* or *Ecos* are great – and ask people to make an offer for the books.

That way we attract them to our displays and educational materials and to our raffle which helps to boost our coffers.

So please stop by on June 26 - we'd love to see you.

### **Vale Bill Helbock**

Richard W. "Bill" Helbock, the long-time partner of our past Secretary and dear friend Cath Clark, passed away suddenly at home on May 15.

A farewell ceremony and celebration of his life was held at Cath and Bill's place in Crisp Drive on Sunday June 6 where people wore red ( his favourite colour) and planted 72 daffodils in memory of each year of his life.

Valley Watch extends its deepest sympathy and support to Cath at this time.

*Gary*