

CONVENOR'S REPORT 1999 TO 2000 FINANCIAL YEAR

The last twelve months has required considerable energy by the association's committee and other regular, dedicated volunteers. Currently the office is staffed between two and three days per week. I would like to thank the people who are staffing and working in and also on the new office. All that effort and more is needed if we are to be effective in promoting greater environmental care by the community.

Twelve months ago we were renting a small and inadequate office as home for the association's activities, now we are tenants in a specially purchased building. This followed two Special General Meetings in 1999 to decide whether to proceed to acquire a property. A Unit Trust (Environment House Trust) that owns the property for investors who have kindly invested in this non profit-making investment has been established. This Trust is a separate entity which protects peoples investments and provides a separate constitution for the ownership of the building. Following our instructions the Trust Deed has been drafted by the solicitor, modified by the trustees and now we are waiting for the final version back from the solicitor. When this occurs the certificates will be issued and the trust deed will be available to all unit holders. This has taken longer than we anticipated but will be finalised soon.

The opening of our new office by Christine Milne on World Environment Day was very successful. We had a day long program of speakers and discussions.

The first event held in Environment House was two travelling photography exhibitions sponsored by Regional Arts Tasmania and Arts Deloraine. The timing was tight but we managed to have a presentable premises for the showing.

I wish to thank the members of the current management committee who have had the additional work of raising funds to purchase the building, starting the unit trust, establishing a new office, coordinating the renovation of the new building as well as the plethora of environmental issues to be handled. There has been good attendance at meetings, good discipline and an enthusiasm that bodes well for the future. Thanks to committee members: Donna Smith, Rosemary Maddox, Kerin Booth, Deb Hunter, Sandy Tiffin, Phill Parsons, Jim Stewart and Annemaree Woodward. A special thanks should be made for the intensive work done by Jim Stewart on renovations of the new building and fundraising for its purchase. Jim, our former treasurer, retired from his position due to health reasons at the end of June 2000. Donna Smith then took over the treasury.

The last twelve months has seen a continuation of a modest, gradual increase in membership. An ongoing increase in membership numbers is an indicator of the wellbeing of the association. It is always good to see new members.

I wish to encourage all members to become more active in the association and to stimulate the organisation with new ideas and energy. Whilst the management committee has been effective there is limited interest and participation in the working groups of the association. As a result the management committee has been meeting every two weeks rather than monthly. Every second meeting has been a campaign meeting working on water, forests and a variety of other regional issues. I encourage members to be more involved with the association to keep it vibrant and alive. This is an important resource for the community. Lets value it.

In terms of community outreach, beyond the office, we have run a market stall at the Deloraine Market with Lesley Jepps being a reliable and enthusiastic coordinator. Thankyou Lesley. The raffles and fundraising events have been invaluable for the wellbeing of the association. Thanks to all those members and other supporters who have fundraised for TEA.

The newsletter has been published approximately six times in the last twelve months. This is an important communication tool of the association. It has been edited by Annemaree Woodward since 1993.

We now have a web site, established by Kath Evans This is yet another way of communicating our message but requires more effort by the organisation to keep it refreshed and up to date.

In Tasmania the last decade has seen a gradual and steady decline in concern and awareness for the environment. The recent Nature Conservation Strategy papers highlighted this issue. What is worse Tasmanians have the least concern for environmental issues of any state in Australia.

Far from being clean and green this state has degraded rivers and water, chemically based food production and an open slather approach to the natural environment and forests that stems from a fundamental lack of respect for the earth coupled with unmitigated greed. We need a persistent and concerted effort to turn around the current status quo.

I have just returned from a trip to Victoria and NSW where I saw more land degradation than you can ever see in Tasmania. We have a unique but limited opportunity to conserve this state's environment before we too have such deeply degraded ecological systems. The current trend with vastly escalated woodchipping of natural forests (currently at over 5 million tons per annum in Tassie) must ring the alarm bells for every thinking person. Our role must be to sound that alarm and to work to stop the degradation. I am sure we all have never before seen such a level of destruction of the natural environment in Tasmania as in the last 2 years since the RFA.

The purpose of this association is to be an advocate for environmental care and responsibility. There are many ways in which we can do this in a positive and helpful way. There is room in the association for people to work in their own way, within their own capacity, in their own time and on the issues, processes and initiatives from which they gain motivation. We are becoming a more effective organisation but this will only occur through a personal commitment to being involved in caring for the environment.

These days, some environment work is technical and complex. For the status quo the task of justifying the unjustifiable and the unsustainable is complex indeed. It is vital that we retain clear and simple goals of environmental care and responsibility. Our objects of informing the public mean that we need to make the issues understandable and accessible to all.

In order to achieve our aims and goals we must operate at a number of levels. Currently the association can operate at the local and regional level. At the state and federal levels however there is no mechanism for achieving outcomes that reflect collective Tasmanian conservation opinion. Because there is no formal way of gaining agreement to a concept, idea or position trying to do so is inefficient, time consuming and often unlikely to succeed. This means we are less powerful and less successful than our ideas warrant.

Recognising an important strategic shortcoming is just the start. We must act on this and support the creation of a state-wide conservation council or combined environment groups.

This year we have successfully campaigned for landscape provisions in the Meander Valley Planning Scheme. In general our collective campaigning to conserve forests continues to be a disheartening exercise and our work on catchment issues frustrating and slow. We

continue to work on Karst issues, private forests, forest practices as well as providing advice and information on a wide range of matters from 1080 poison to local government planning issues as well as energy conservation initiatives, wildlife fencing and biodiversity.

In the coming year The Environment Association will continue to work on a substantial agenda of local, regional and state-wide environmental and conservation issues, initiatives and problems. We have advised the federal government that we will work to:

- Increase the level of care and respect for the earth. Raise community awareness of the list of issues as shown above and produce pamphlets on major issues of concern. We plan to train volunteers to interact with the community.
- Push for the Tasmanian Government to introduce land clearance legislation. We will highlight the extent of current land clearance in Tasmania. We obviously need legislation not a half-baked strategy.
- Highlight the lack of healthy river systems. Significantly raise community awareness of river problems i.e. pollution, loss of flow etc
- Encourage significant forest conservation on private land to conserve natural; forests endangered species and biodiversity. Change community attitude to increase care and concern for biodiversity. Identify areas of high conservation privately owned forest and refer them to the RFA Private Land Reserve Program and other private land conservation organisations.
- Establish meaningful dialogue with State Government agencies with an aim to gain signage commitments to ensure that RFA reserves are adequately sign posted to increase public awareness and protect reserves from firewood getters, rubbish dumping and disposal of unwanted pets.
- Support and promote the vision of ecologically sustainable development. A truly clean & green Tasmania with reduced pollution of industries. Encourage the building of carbon content (humus) of agricultural soils. Lobby for an agricultural code of practice and protection of riparian zones. Propose an improved Forest Practices Code. Produce pamphlets on sustainable agricultural practices and unsustainable forestry.
- Hold a Regional Environment Forum so that more people who are concerned about the environment can share and establish consensus based community goals.
- Undertake Training –Team-building, conflict resolution, assertiveness and consensus decision-making to increase the effective participation of volunteers in the association.
- Develop a Training Manual to facilitate greater involvement in environmental issues by people who are well informed.

We will only increase involvement in environmental programs of The Environment Association with collective energy, involvement and commitment to goals we share.

I have been Convenor of the association since part way through the 1996/97 term and for the whole of the 1997/98, 1998/99 and 1999/2000 terms. The other long term office bearer of the association is the current Secretary who has been re-elected to that office five times now. Annemaree Woodward is to be congratulated on a sterling effort in a key position for the association.

Crucial in achieving environmental outcomes will be more involvement in the association at the campaign level, the financial level, or perhaps most importantly at the human resource level. The purely volunteer nature of this association means that the buck stops with all of us. There are no signs that the work load is diminishing, in fact the contrary is true. We remain the only rural based environment centre and the only unfunded centre in Tasmania. This year we applied for a GVEHO grant but are not holding our collective breath.

A motion before this AGM will, if successful, amend our constitution to limit the holding of an office to three consecutive terms. I support this amendment. It is important that new people learn to do the various functions and positions and become involved. It is important that an opportunity to pass on our experience exists and is valued. More involvement is imperative.

The other amendments proposed for our constitution will:

- Allow the association to take legal action with the confidence that we have standing in court.
- Allow TEA to accept tax deductible donations.
- Improve the provisions of our membership, including the creation of a new position on the management committee; that of Membership Secretary. Currently membership is the responsibility of the public officer.

These are the first changes to our constitution since we changed our name. All members have received the details of the proposals. I should remind you all the our constitution commits the organisation to being apolitical. We remain firmly issue driven.

I would like to announce a recent initiative to sponsor the office of the association, introduced only a month ago this scheme already has people making regular contributions to keep the organisation afloat. It is important that we achieve this efficiently to allow enough time and energy to pursue environmental issues. We still cannot afford a telephone with the association continuing to rely on my personal phone and facsimile at my cost.

It is vitally important that we increase our profile and raise the level of concern for the environment in the community. We, as an organisation, are obviously going to survive but there is an enormous task and if we are to be successful in promoting the survival of the planet in the longer term we must become more influential and persuasive to achieve our goals.

Andrew Ricketts
Convenor