

CONVENOR'S REPORT 1998 TO 1999 FINANCIAL YEAR

The last twelve months has been a busy and exciting time for this association. Twelve months ago we were the Deloraine Environment Centre and did not have an office and home for the association's activities.

The last twelve months has required considerable energy by the committee and other regular, dedicated volunteers. The creation and staffing of the office is a considerable financial and logistical commitment. Currently the office is staffed between two and 2½ days per week. I would like to thank the people who are staffing and working in and on the office. All that effort and more is needed if we are to continue. The office opening on World Environment Day was very successful. I wish to encourage members to call into the office to keep it vibrant and alive.

I would also like to thank the members of the current management committee. This committee has been the most energetic and cohesive that the association has had for many years. There has been good attendance at meetings, good discipline and an enthusiasm that bodes well for the future. Thanks go to Yoona Welling, Mick Downing, , Deb Hunter, Sandy Tiffin, Phill Parsons, Jim Stewart and Annemaree Woodward.

The last twelve months has seen a gradual and steady increase in our membership. An ongoing increase in membership numbers is a vital indicator of the wellbeing of the association. It is always good to see new members. I invite new members to become active in the association and to stimulate the organisation with new ideas and energy.

It is important in these days of reduced parliamentary representation (regardless of party) to work both smarter and harder through the community. For those who have been denied a representative voice in Parliament the imperative to communicate a message of care for the earth is more important than ever.

In the last twelve months community participation has taken on new meaning for this association. We sit on two catchment

management groups, having resigned from the Rubicon group, have four members on the MCCG biodiversity sub-committee, are involved in the Meander Valley NRM strategy, have been and will continue participating in the RFA visitor interpretation centre project, have been working on the new water legislation and continue to work on pressing 1080 issues, Private Timber Reserves, Forest practices breaches, landscape protection, The Meander Valley Council's strategic planning process, the Tasmanian Threatened Species Strategy as well as assisting individuals with their own environmental problems.

In terms of community outreach, beyond the office, we have started holding a market stall again at the Deloraine Market with Mick Downing being the enthusiastic coordinator, Sandy Tiffin has started up Politics in the Pub and we are planning some walks and inspections for September which is National biodiversity month. The newsletter has started again after a long hiatus. This is the fundamental communication tool of the association. It has been edited by Annemaree Woodward for several years now.

The newsletter will get an overhaul soon with the addition of our new computer which has just arrived. Apart from office furniture needed to furnish the office this is the first major capital expense since 1992 and reflects the improved energy of the association. Phill Parsons organised the new computer.

We have decided to connect to the internet and to have a web site. This will be yet another way of communicating our message.

This year has seen development work on the association's strategic plan. This plan will guide the association into the future. A document reflecting the progress made is available for any member to peruse and comment upon. The input of all members is welcome. Our thanks to Jim Stewart for his energy and input to date.

One result of the strategic planning process is the identification of three prime campaign areas: Water and catchments, Biodiversity and its threats, and Agriculture. Far from being clean and green this state live with degraded rivers, chemically based food production and an open slather approach to the natural environment that stems from a fundamental lack of respect for the earth. We should be under no misconception about the persistent and concerted effort that is required to turn around the current status quo.

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 that they gain motivation from. We are currently on the edge of being a far more effective organisation but this will only occur through organisation and personal commitment to being involved in caring for the environment.

Many organisation's are established purely to service their membership. The Environment Association is here to serve the earth and it does this purely in the public interest avoiding completely the common traps of vested interest.

The association is a member of Volunteering Tasmania, the peak organisation representing volunteers. This year we attended the State Conference where it became very clear that more effort had to be expended in inducting and training our members. Currently we have no budget and have not allocated the time to develop these critical programs. This must be priority for this coming year.

These days, some environment work is technical and complex. For our opponents 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.

This year both The Wilderness Society and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust have shown an interest in joining our association. Our new name reflects the wider geographic membership trend.

Recently the conservation movement has been split over a deal done with the Democrats to introduce new environment legislation reducing federal powers to protect the environment.

The problem has highlighted the fact that there is no representative umbrella organisation to work on behalf of the Tasmanian environment movement. I wish to introduce to you an important initiative that I and a few others have been working on for some time. Now the time is right to proceed.

Clearly the role of environment movement representation requires a dedicated organisation (a new organisation) with delineated processes, functions and objects that are transparent within the conservation movement and to others. It must perform functions similar to other industry associations that represent the views of their sector, especially at the political level.

Individual conservation organisations be they local, regional, statewide or national would all retain their own roles and specialities.

It will allow the development of a more diverse and more flexible conservation movement. There will be greater participation and input in achieving movement wide positions.

Other sectors have excellent industry associations. We see the results of their concerted influence on government policy. Why wouldn't we seek those benefits for the environment movement?

The start of the new millennium is an appropriate time to start operating in a new way. Gaining energy from a more united and collective vision is essential if we consider the imperative of environmental care and responsibility.

You may wonder what all this has to do with The Environment Association. 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 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. Now I hope I have convinced you that we must act on this and that you will support the creation of a statewide conservation council or combined environment groups.

In the coming year The Environment Association will continue to work on a substantial agenda of local, regional and statewide environmental and conservation issues, initiatives and problems. We will only do this with collective energy, involvement and commitment to the goals we share.

Crucial in achieving environmental outcomes will be wider involvement in the development of 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.

The End

Andrew Ricketts, Convenor