

## **CONVENOR'S REPORT 2004-2005**

### **Introduction**

Only six years ago The Environment Association rented a small, inadequate office for its activities. This was after several years of homelessness. In those days the association consisted of a few boxes of files, some odds and ends of furniture and the dedication of a group of volunteers committed to improving environmental outcomes for our region.

Today we meet and work at Environment House. This is made possible by the establishment of Environment House Trust and the support it receives from the people who own unit shares in the trust.

So in that respect, life for The Environment Association is very different but the dedication of volunteers has not changed. Everything that is done by TEA is an act of selflessness. All the people who work for this association are volunteers. Volunteers are the heart, soul and lifeblood of The Environment Association. Please remember that as I outline to you the activities and achievements of TEA over the last 12 months.

Over the years there have sometimes been too few willing volunteers to even manage monthly meetings. For this reason just last year we reluctantly reduced the number of Management Team members needed to provide a quorum for a meeting to four. I'm very happy to be able to report that every management meeting was attended by more than a quorum and sometimes by the entire management team.

### **Thanks**

I have a list of thanks so I'd like to start with a big thank you to the Management Team for its strong commitment throughout the year. As well I wish to especially thank Ross Ulman for assisting the Management Team. While Ross is not a member of the Team he has looked after the finances, attended most meetings and pitched in various other ways as well.

Further repairs, renovations and maintenance were carried out at Environment House, including painting the outside west wall, cleaning gutters, completing the painting of our second rental room, mowing grass, replacing the leaking sky light in the kitchen and possibly other jobs that I've forgotten. For all this I thank the following people:- Dave Watts, Tony Elkin, Craig Walker and Andrew Ricketts.

I'd also like to thank our tenant Mary Jane Vaughan for the contribution she makes to the survival of TEA through the rental she pays for her office and also for being a very good tenant.

Our thanks should also go to Meander Valley Council for funding through the Community Grants Scheme to provide an energy efficient hot water service. Unfortunately the unit is not yet operational due to the 19<sup>th</sup> century wiring of the house. For this oversight you can thank me as I didn't consider this when making the grant application. The Trustees of Environment House have taken on the responsibility of replacing the wiring and we hope to have hot water to the sink and the bathroom wash basin early next year.

Thanks go to Phill Parsons for lending money to the association last year when funds were very short and then allowing us to partly settle the debt by transferring on of the association's units in EHT to him. We also wish to Shaun MacElwaine for donating his unit to TEA.

My last thank you is for services of long standing, indeed that date all the way back to the beginnings of the association in 1991. For his outstanding services to TEA our special thanks are extended to Jim Stewart to whom we have gifted an honorary life membership.

Thanks again to all the volunteers who are the life of The Environment Association. There will be a few more thanks later on in this report but if I leave anyone out of my thanks list please don't think it is intentional. Everyone's contribution is valued but my memory could be faulty.

## **Campaigns**

This year our work has been dominated by the Private Timber Reserve application 1698. For anyone who doesn't know this covers 1,100 hectares, almost 40% of the private land of Reedy Marsh. There is considerable opposition to the declaration of PTR 1698 and with the assistance of Councillor Bob Loone an appeal in the public interest is being mounted through Meander Valley Council. Nearly 200 people signed a petition that we presented to Council to seek their support in this appeal. The Reedy Marsh Forest Conservation Group prepared a substantial document covering the issues

As well there are more 30 people who have lodged objections to PTR 1698. While we wish to thank Meander Valley Council for appealing in the public interest we can not thank them for making the whole process so difficult. Thanks do go to Bob Loone, without whom the council appeal would not go ahead.

Much of the work of the upcoming appeal falls on one person and for that reason I ask you all to thank Andrew Ricketts for his dedication to the issue and to forest conservation in general. Without Andrew the appeal would likely have no substance. There is still a lot to do. Anyone who wants to assist with the appeal is more than welcome.

In order to ensure that the public interest appeal went ahead TEA signed an agreement to indemnify the council, if in the event that the appeal is lost, costs are awarded against it. There was no other way forward and we deemed the issue was worth the risk. I must add that costs have never been awarded in a Forest Practices Tribunal Hearing.

There are however expenses. A number of generous donations have assisted so far, together with some smaller contributions which are likewise appreciated. Our special thanks go to Mike and Judy Hawkes, the Meander Valley Greens and Tim Morris for donations to assist in preparation for the PTR appeal. Much of the funds are already spent, mostly in communications to the large number of people involved. More donations are urgently needed and help with fundraising would be greatly appreciated. Meetings regarding the PTR appeal are held as needed, usually at Environment House. TEA has assisted here by providing the meeting room free of charge. If you want to be advised of meeting times and to be involved please let Andrew Ricketts know.

Other campaign matters have involved logging in a Karst area at Caveside where a breach of the Forest Practices Code reported by Debbie Hunter resulted in a conviction and a fine of \$10,000. Well done Deb. We also assisted Kevin & Jacqueline Harris in their appeal against a PTR on karst land at Mole Creek

We've contributed substantial time and energy to the establishment of Environment Tasmania, a state-wide representative body for non-government conservation and environment groups, which is yet to come into its own.

In the run up to the last federal election we did considerable lobbying for forests and joined in with Protecting Forests Growing Jobs – a lobby and strategy paper for forest conservation signed by 18 forest conservation groups across the state.

We assisted the Carpenters, a couple from Wyena who were directly sprayed with toxic chemicals by a helicopter working over a Gunns plantation. We continue to provide a help-line for people with environmental problems, especially those related to forestry which still form the vast majority of enquiries we receive.

## Events

With the heavy load of campaign work there has been little spare time or energy to organise events. Nevertheless there have been several. Early in the year David Abram, a magician, poet and conservation activist from the USA provided an evening's entertainment with a poetic nature conservation slant. We thank Peter Hay from University of Tasmania for bring David to us.

On World Environment Day we celebrated TEA's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. To advertise the event we held an art competition with some students from year 2 of Deloraine High School producing posters to advertise the event. Our thanks to Anne LeFevre for the somewhat difficult coordination of this part of the birthday celebration. We had a focus on organic food for WED so our guest speaker for the day was Kevin Bough of Biodynamics Tasmania who talked about the principles of biodynamic growing. I prepared a Potted History of TEA to celebrate our 15 years. I intended to bring some copies tonight but due to repeated virus problems with the home computer, it seems to be one of the files that are lost. If anyone has a hard copy of my Potted History, I'd love to have it. We finished off our birthday celebration with an all [most] organic afternoon tea, prepared of course by volunteers.

In August we held a Trivia Night. This was largely organised by Ken & Anne LeFevre. It was a lot of fun and helped raise some much needed funds for TEA's survival. Numerous other people contributed prizes, or helped in some other way so our thanks to Ken & Anne and everyone else who helped make the Trivia night a success.

## Submissions

Every year there are more processes for which governments seek public input. We often wonder why. This year we made submission to the Tasmanian Government's Aerial Spraying Code of Practice, it's Better Planning Options paper and the Draft Land Use and Development Strategy of the Meander Valley Council. As well we have written objections concerning the PTR applications 1597 & 1698.

## TEA News

This last 12 months there have been only 3 issues of our newsletter. This remains the only direct communication we have with our members. I'd love to see us producing an issue every two months or even more often. It just needs for people to write material and a small team to produce and distribute the newsletter.

## The Upcoming Year

At last year's AGM we changed the constitution to allow for a life membership category and a public fund for tax deductible donations. To date our only life members are honoraries. Nevertheless the category is available to anyone who wishes to sign on for the long term. The public fund is not yet in operation. It requires its own management committee for which the necessary volunteers have not yet materialised.

In the recent past I took my limited skills to our website with the aim of bringing it up to date and making it more interesting and pertinent. Lo and behold, last week we received a generous offer from Michael Lichon, an EHT unit holder, to design a new website for us. We have yet to take up Michael's great offer but I'm sure we can look forward to bringing TEA to the world with a bang in the near future.

It is my fond hope that despite the mounting need for campaign work we will have time to hold several events in the upcoming year and that these will be planned well in advance so as to be run with ease and be great successes.

Some people have an expectation that we will run a fully staffed office and have Environment House open so they can drop in. We are criticised because this does not happen. Most often these complaints come from people who are not members and not yet willing to help. The reality is there is too much work for too few volunteers.

I see that our priorities over the next year are to expand TEA's membership base, to have more involvement and raise funds for administration and campaigns. As well we need to form a dynamic group to design the planned extension to Environment House, to make a show case of environmental care that will further meet the needs of conservation and environment campaigns and education in our region. As well I'd like to see us apply for as many grants as possible. I'd also like to see us in a position where we could allocate some funds to upgrading our library.

## **Conclusion**

Our office still needs a lot of organisation. This involves the tedious business of filing and archiving but we need to do it so that we can become more efficient. You've heard it before – work smarter, not harder. Our library too is in disarray. It needs to be re-ordered following its several moves and for someone to take on the role of sourcing modern books and other material that will make it more interesting.

Membership needs a big boost. We need a couple of people prepared to work on a membership drive.

Fundraising is a major priority. TEA lives constantly hand to mouth and many good things are not done due to lack of funds. A group of people to do this vital work is urgently needed.

People can help organise events, help renovate and maintain Environment House, maybe even have the house open one or two days a week.

We need people with coordination skills to help bring the threads together and we need people who can inspire other people to be involved.

Tonight what volunteers can do is take on a role on the Management Team, be prepared to get together over the next twelve months for another year of *caring for home*.

Thank you all for being here tonight.

Annemaree Woodward

Convenor