

# **Nambucca Valley Conservation Association AGM 11 Feb 2020**

## **President's Report by Paula Flack**

What a huge year we have had! Once again, our focus has been on native forests across a wide range of actions and activities and justifiably so. Now more than ever it has become clearly apparent how important forests are for climate and indeed planet health.

It has been a year of extremes - drought, fires and floods. An election year, with both State and Federal elections returning conservative, climate change denying governments. We are in trouble.

In the lead up to the elections, NVCA donated to NEFA and NPA's TV ad campaigns, which gained considerable exposure.

Sadly though, we all know the results and are enduring the appalling decimation of environmental laws, departments and management in NSW. We must now wait until 2022 and 2023 for a chance to get rid of these irresponsible coalition governments.

In March, we were stoked to be advised that our Lush grant application to fund a new website had been approved. Work carried on apace with website design and content thanks to the skills of graphic designer Miranda van Son and web builder Jono and we proudly launched our new site in June.

In support of community groups, ethical cosmetics company Lush produces charity pot lids based on information submitted by community groups which have received grants. I sent them Lyn's famous New England Wilderness photo and a spiel about NVCA and was thrilled to stumble upon 'NVCA' charity pots in the Queen Vic store in Sydney sometime later. I promptly bought  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their supply, while daughter Erica proudly told the amused staff that NVCA was "Mum's group!".

Strange to think that these little pots of hand cream are being sold around Australia with NVCA's image and forest campaign story on the lids. They are still being produced and are still on the shelves.

Thanks to our wonderful team of volunteers, we also ran a number of forest stalls over the past year. These stalls while hard work, are a great way to catch up with locals and spread the word of our forest campaign.

Our focus for much of the past year has been on the Great Koala National Park (GKNP) proposal.

We hosted tours into the Nambucca hinterland areas of the GKNP for a number of people including shadow environment minister Kate Washington. Unfortunately, our planned GKNP trips for Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi and Nambucca Shire Council had to be cancelled due to the bushfires.

We were also instrumental in getting the Bowraville Chamber of Commerce to agree to host a very successful public information session on the GKNP in the Bowra Theatre where over 100 people turned up with all but one showing support for the proposal. Interestingly the one objector appeared to have been sent with a list of questions and declared that a GKNP would prevent her from polluting her creek with agricultural waste!!

After years of struggle to see Council reduce its use of chemicals on roadside vegetation, NVCA in tandem with strong community voices mainly from South and North Arm howled down Council's poorly drafted and frankly hostile roadside vegetation management plan. The draft plan proposed absurdly inflated fees for those who wanted to be included on a spray free register. It was patently clear that Council staff did not want to improved its roadside vegetation management practices preferring to continue business as usual involving blanket spraying of Roundup from one end of the shire to the other.

A rare good news story indeed was the result of the council meeting in June where councillors voted against the staff recommendations to introduce a No Spray Register at no cost to rate payers and instead fund the process from the Environmental Levy budget. Mind you, we still haven't seen any evidence of the establishment of the register yet.

In July we made a submission to the Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitat in NSW and last week saw Lyn Orrego representing NVCA and myself representing the GKNP Steering Committee give evidence to the enquiry in Coffs Harbour. A rather gruelling experience, but one we hope will contribute to the inquiry making solid recommendations to the NSW Parliament, not least of which is for the immediate cessation of logging in public native forests within the GKNP and the creation of the GKNP as a matter of urgency.

All our earlier travails and challenges to protect the environment paled into insignificance as the catastrophic fires of Nov and Dec unfolded with tragic consequences. I do not wish to dwell on them too much other than to wish our affected NVCA members, friends and families all the very best for a speedy recovery and hope that the traumatic experiences that many have faced will never ever be repeated.

The one good thing to come from these unprecedented times is that many have woken up to the fact that climate change is here now and affects us all. Even coalition parliamentarians have shown the courage and intelligence to declare this and push for a real response from the NSW Govt not just "adaptation" but mitigation and a clear and rapid path to phase out fossil fuels. The next elections will be interesting indeed in these changing times.

Now the rains have come and with them enormous amounts of sediment and ash being washed into water courses are causing fish kills from deoxygenation and elevated pH levels. It will take many years for our fragile ecosystems to recover from these unprecedented conditions and damage.

NVCA signed on to a letter to the NSW premier calling for moratorium on logging in state forests of north east NSW until damage from the bushfires can be assessed.

On a more positive note NVCA held a very successful fundraising dinner in late November which from all accounts, seems to have been a rather welcome chance to catch up with friend in trouble bushfire times. For me it was a rather strange experience not having had anything to do with the organisation or in fact being in attendance on the night, due to work commitments. But I must heartily thank Georgie, Wendy, Michelle and their team, for their efforts to pull off what sounded like a wonderful night, bolstered our forest campaign funds significantly and may very well be our most successful fundraiser ever.

In mid-December we were thrilled to see the opening of the rebadged Urunga Visitors Centre as the Great Koala National Park Information and Visitors Centre, thanks to the

generosity of Bellingen Shire Council, financial support from NVCA and hard work and commitment of the newly formed Management Team and supporters made up mainly of NVCA members.

As we face the unprecedented environmental challenges of our times headed up by climate change, we must remember that for all the good work happening on the ground by ordinary citizens, major political parties continue to receive vast donations from the fossil fuel industries.

Leading up to the last federal election, gas company Woodside donated over \$283k to both the Labor and Liberal parties. The month after the Morrison Government approved its coal mine, Adani gave the Liberal-National Coalition \$200k and Clive Palmer spent an obscene \$83 million on political donations – all paid for by his mining companies.

The failure of truly uninfluenced democratic leadership has led to the political mess this country is in and has resulted in the lowest ever levels of public trust and respect for our governments.

It is up to ordinary citizens to show their disdain for the failures of governments to address climate change and we have a few years to ram home the message before the next elections.

This year brought two personal highlights. Firstly, my being awarded the Allen Strom Hall of Fame NSW Environmental Award after being nominated by NVCA. What a wonderful surprise to hear I had been nominated, followed by total disbelief when I received the phone call from NCEC's Jim Morrison who was at the Annual Conference dinner where the awards were underway, to advise me that I had won! Thank you all for thinking me worthy of nomination and taking the time to put the information together. I'll share my bottle of wine with you when I get it off of Jim.

My second highlight is the discovery of wombats at Girralong. The elusive critter was caught on digital thermal camera in forest not far from my property and scats have also been found in another side gully nearby. The finding is scientifically significant and is causing a little excitement in scientific circles.

I must thank each and every one of my NVCA colleagues for their dedicated efforts on behalf of NVCA through the past twelve months. You are all amazing and without your efforts in particular Carol as our secretary and treasurer and Georgie and Wendy as our fundraising stalwarts, we simply could not achieve the things we do.

Thanks to Phil, Joy, Steve, Sal and Jenny Joske who represent NVCA on various committees.

Also a very special thankyou to Lyn Orrego for her awesome forest research, mapping and campaign strategy work.

We can hold our heads high in the knowledge that NVCA works closely together with passion, integrity and respect and we get things done!

Thankyou.