



Annual Report 2015-16

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OUR MAJOR PARTNERS

These organisations provide financial or in kind support for Mackay Conservation Group, or receive financial or in kind support from us, or collaborate with us on projects.

Australian Youth Climate Coalition, Environment Defenders Office Queensland, Environment Defenders Office NSW, Queensland Conservation Council, GetUp!, The Australian Geographic Society, Whitsunday Residents Against Dumping, Mackay Regional Council, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Birdlife Mackay, Protect the Bush Alliance, 350.org, Doctors for the Environment Australia, Lock the Gate, The Australia Institute, Mackay and District Turtle Watch. The Australian Conservation Foundation, Bicycle Mackay, Mackay Recreational Fishing Alliance, The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Thanks to the many people who donated to the Mackay Conservation Group. We (literally) couldn't do it without you!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mackay Conservation Group has always punched above its weight and 2015-16 has been no exception. Our legal challenge to the federal environment minister's approval of the Adani Carmichael coal mine was a huge risk for the group. If we lost, we could possibly have faced legal bills that would have been very challenging for our small group. That didn't stop the group from acting in the best interest of the environment. Of course, in the end we won our part of the battle but the struggle continues.

Mackay Conservation Group has a tradition of taking on big challenges. When we campaigned against the logging of our local rainforests in the 1990s we were pilloried. However the world didn't end when we won that campaign. The chainsaws no longer ring out in our rainforests yet we are able to enjoy timber products sourced from other sustainable locations. The same happened when we fought for more Green Zones in the Great Barrier Reef. Many in the fishing community opposed the move but today there is widespread recognition that larger green zones have been great for fish and for fishing. Today we are the only local group campaigning against the Adani Carmichael mine and it can often seem that we are on our own but experience shows us that following scientific reasoning will always win out in the end. That's why we are confident in the decisions we make.

Looking back on 2015-16, it seems almost impossible that a group like ours could find the resources to be involved in so many activities. We have organised rallies, undertaken research, responded to local, national and international media, made submissions and undertaken a lot of community outreach. If it wasn't for the support of volunteers — some of them who have been part of the group for more than two decades and some who have only recently joined us — we would never be able to do what we do. Volunteers are the backbone of our organisation and always have been. From our management committee to the presenters at our Beautiful Walks, volunteers play an active role in all the group's activities.

Some of our volunteers do more than give their time, they often give money as well. A big part of Mackay Conservation Group's budget comes from donations, everything from a couple of dollars to many thousands. When people donate their time or money we know that we have support in our local community. The group's volunteer work is supported by very competent staff. Our staff play an important role as the day to day contacts between the group and the wider community. They do a great job and often do far more than they are hired to do.

Mackay Conservation Group is well placed to remain successful into the future. We have a strong balance sheet and many valuable physical and intellectual resources. If we continue to have the support of our local community, we will be able to respond to the issues that we know are affecting the environment today and to deal with new ones that will inevitably arise.

One of our key challenges in 2017 will be to enhance our already strong supporter base and bring more new people into our organisation. We will revise our strategic planning and develop a mid term plan to expand the number of people involved in MCG and improve their skills. I invite all members to become more involved in some aspect of our many activities.

Michael Williams

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

I returned to a role at Mackay Conservation Group in 2015 with some trepidation. I was coordinator of the group many years ago when the mining boom was beginning and the coastal development boom was in full swing. It was depressing to be the person in Mackay who knew most about all the plans that were afoot to do damage to the natural environment. In those days the group worked on a shoestring budget. It was very competently managed but resources were hard to find and contact with other environmental groups was infrequent.

Coming back to MCG in 2015, I saw that much had changed. The Environment Centre is a vibrant place with talented workers and volunteers dropping in for meetings or just to find out what they can do to lend a hand. Members of the management committee visit frequently to check on the welfare of the organisation and staff. We also have the opportunity to meet up with other environmental groups on a very frequent basis. Technology has overcome the tyranny of distance in the past 15 years. MCG's current success is a tribute to all those people who have struggled through the hard times and laid the platform for success in the future.

To remain stable Mackay Conservation Group must have a diverse range of funding sources. We already have some very generous donors who contribute significantly to our day to day operations but we need to widen that group. The number of donors will be one of our key measures of financial success in 2017.

Nobody donates their cash to an organisation without thinking it will be used wisely and effectively so MCG also needs a strong campaign plan for the year ahead. In recent times we have asked you, our members and supporters, to tell us how you think we should be allocating our time. In some ways the results of that survey reflected the work we are already doing but in other ways it was surprising. You told us very strongly that we should be continuing our work to oppose the Adani Carmichael mine. While we can't guarantee that the Adani mine will be dead and buried this year, we will continue with our imaginative and well thought through campaigning. We will also be focusing attention on community outreach and education. Water quality in our streams, renewable energy, tree clearing and the Great Barrier Reef were also big concerns raised in the survey. We will develop ways for you to become involved in all those issues.

Another measure of our success in 2017 will be the number and the strength of our membership. We will set an achievable target for membership growth and develop a clear plan to achieve it. Our membership is what makes us a powerful organisation. During the year there will be many opportunities for members to get together and meet each other, informally or at meetings. Keep an eye on our newsletters for more on that.

Even though national and international spotlight may not have shone as brightly on Mackay Conservation Group in 2016 as it did in 2015, our group's competence and courage is still recognised. Let's all work together to ensure that we are in good shape in 2017 to take on whatever challenges are thrown at us.

Peter McCallum

CAMPAIGNING

Carmichael Mine

In early 2015 Mackay Conservation Group launched a legal challenge against the federal environment minister's approval of Adani's 60 megatonne per annum Carmichael coal mine. This mine will make an enormous contribution to climate change and if built would lead the way to the construction of several more huge mines in the Galilee Basin.



We challenged the minister's decision on a number of grounds — the impacts of the mine on global climate, the poor environmental record of the Adani company and the minister's failure to properly consider the impact of the project on two threatened reptile species — and we won. In August 2015, Federal Environment Minister formally withdrew his approval of the mine. Subsequently, he considered the impact of the mine on the Yakka Skink and the Ornamental Snake, found that they would not be harmed and reapproved the mine. Of course Greg Hunt could have taken the opportunity to reconsider the project and deny approval altogether but he failed to do that. No surprises there.

The fight to stop the Carmichael mine continues. The Australian Conservation Foundation took up the case against the environment minister after his re-approval. ACF's appeal was heard by a single judge of the Federal Court who denied the challenge. ACF has appealed the judge's decision to the full bench of the court. Mackay Conservation Group is still playing an important role in this national and international campaign.

Mine Rehabilitation

Across Australia there are over 50,000 abandoned mine sites and 15,300 of them are in Queensland. This is a legacy of poor government regulation of mining and an industry that has little concern for the damage that it does to the land. By failing to restore and rehabilitate mines the mining industry is failing to provide jobs that are required by law and leaving behind a landscape that is unsafe and unsustainable.

Mackay Conservation Group has been working closely with Lock the Gate to bring about change in rehabilitation policy and practice in Queensland. We have been raising questions regarding the rehabilitation liability faced by Queensland taxpayers since October 2015. This has led to the formation of a high level inter-departmental committee that has been investigating the performance of the financial assurance system in Queensland. We are hopeful that we can have significant input into the outcome of that process.





Vote for the Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is under pressure from many human activities. The greatest is climate change, which could make it impossible for the reef to survive. Earlier this year we witnessed the largest coral bleaching event in the reef's history. 90% of reefs suffered some bleaching and increasing global temperatures are going to make bleaching more frequent and damaging. High volumes of fertiliser and pesticide runoff into waterways, enables crown of thorns starfish to reach plague proportions.

During the 2016 federal election, Mackay Conservation Group worked cooperatively with a number of other organisations such as the Australian Marine Conservation Society, Whitsunday Residents Against Dumping and North Queensland Conservation Council to raise awareness of the plight of the reef. Our campaign led to significant changes in the policies of the major political parties. Significant promises were made to provide funding for reef protection, increased surveillance of commercial vessels and waterway health. Of course much more needs to be done and we are continuing to draw attention to the health of our marine environment.

People's Climate March

In December last year, the world's governments gathered in Paris to discuss the response to human caused climate change. People around the globe marched to call for urgent and significant action on global warming. Mackay was no exception. Around 300



people took to the streets in our city to demand that the Australian government act to limit the emission of greenhouse gases. Many of the people who came along had never participated in any form of public demonstration before but this is such an important issue they had to make their voice heard.

The outcome of the Paris climate talks was an agreement that the world should take steps to limit global temperature increase to less than 2°C and to strive to keep it below 1.5°C. The Australian Government signed the agreement but has yet to ratify it or demonstrate that it will take urgent action to reduce Australia's production of greenhouse gases. Our governments at all levels are struggling to resolve the conflict between supporting the development of new coal mines and standing behind the science that they know is true. Rather than taking the action that is needed today, our politicians are putting off decisions and making the choice harder for the next generation of Australians.



Great Barrier Reef Divers

Over 69,000 people depend on the Great Barrier Reef for their employment. A key group are the divers and dive tourism operators who spend their working lives visiting the reef. The Great Barrier Reef Divers is an organisation of dive professionals who are standing up for the reef. Membership of the group includes dive professionals who have experience working on the Great Barrier Reef. These dive professionals see, hear and feel the impacts on the reef. The campaign has had a simple

goal: to encourage reef management agencies and governments at all levels to better protect the Great Barrier Reef through advocacy and action.

MCG's Tony Fontes has been organising the Great Barrier Reef Divers for the past few years, calling on divers along the Queensland coast to observe and report damage to the reef. In 2015 a group of dive professionals visited Abbot Point to gather evidence of coral reefs that didn't exist according to the Environmental Impact Statement produced for the coal port expansion. The group obtained photographic evidence that gained national media attention. The GBR Divers also played a leading role in drawing attention to the coral bleaching event that hit the reef in 2016.

RESEARCH

Eungella Honeyeater

Mackay Conservation Group worked with Birdlife Australia and Birdlife Mackay and volunteers in the Crediton State Forest to monitor the Eungella honeyeater. In 2013 the Dept of Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry issued permits to allow logging to recommence. We wanted know why, and what effect the resumption of selective logging of trees the bird uses for food. This species is only found in the eucalypt woodlands of Eungella National Park and the surrounding state forest. They play an important role in maintaining forest health by eating insect larvae that live on forest trees.



Surveys since 1998 indicated a dramatic drop from 60 to a current maximum of 10 birds per survey. We wanted to find out what the cause may be. It could be loss of habitat or changes in rainfall (which affect flowering intensity and nectar production) that affected the number of birds sited. It appears that both are factors but once food tree density falls below 10 per hectare the forest can no longer sustain a population of Eungella Honeyeaters. Mackay Conservation Group's research analyst, Patricia Julien, is continuing to organise this research project in 2016/17. We are aiming to understand the economic as well as environmental benefits of protecting the habitat of this species that is unique to the Mackay Region.



Community Transitions

The Community Transitions Group was formed following social change researcher, Amanda Cahill's visit to Mackay. Amanda presented the results of work she had undertaken in the United States and the Philippines that showed that communities facing significant economic challenges were most effective if they used their own resources rather solely relying on external support. The group met every week to plan a study of Mackay residents perceptions of the local economy and to organise a tour of opportunities for Mackay to become economically diverse.

The Community Transition Group's broadly representative survey unsurprisingly found that the vast majority (over 90%) of people felt that the decline in the coal industry had caused Mackay's economic downturn. Some of the comments the survey received included *"Unless you were directly associated with the mines there was a two tier society. Expensive place to live, it over-inflated everything"* and *"It did allow for growth and employment but on the downside house prices rose and agriculture including mills had problems with finding workers"*. The survey revealed that on the whole Mackay people feel confident that they have a strong chance of a good economic future and that they expect local government to take the leading role in driving the economy forward.

Urannah Creek Dam

During 2015 federal and state government MPs continued organising a campaign to promote the damming of Urannah Creek, on the western side of the Clarke Range. Their campaign has culminated in funding for a feasibility study into the dam.

The creek is part of the Burdekin River catchment and is one of the places where Irwin's Turtle — named after the famed naturalist Steve Irwin — is found. Urannah Creek is the traditional country of the Wiri and Birri people, the river people, who have made it their home for thousands of generations.



The land is steep and rocky and includes dense forests. Its inaccessibility has protected it from incursions by Europeans for the past 2030 years. It contains endangered regional ecosystems such as a s Blue Gum forest. Those forests contain koalas, tree kangaroos and other kangaroo species.

In 2015 Mackay Conservation Group commissioned research into the economic potential of building a dam on Urannah Creek. The research found that there have been 19 previous studies in regard to dams on this catchment, none of which have been found to be economically viable. We continue to work with the traditional owners to protect this river from damage.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Beautiful Walks

Our Beautiful Walks program continued in 2015 and 2016 and we visited a number of new locations close to Mackay. We returned to the privately owned Wetlands Walkabout with a large group of enthusiastic supporters who wanted a chance to observe the work that had been done to restore this estuary system. We also returned to Shoal Point and to see the stunning array of marine creatures that are observable at low tide. The walks have been popular with Mackay residents of all ages.

During 2016 a local high school student, Tom Rainsford, took over organising our beautiful walks and arranged visits to Shellgrit Creek, Lagoons Creek and Slade Point Reserve. The walks have been well attended and we will continue to organise them with volunteer support in 2017.

Green Arts

The Regional Arts Development Fund generously provided Mackay Conservation Group with a grant to produce a display highlighting the beauty of and the threats to wildlife and culture in Mackay's hinterland. Patricia Julien and Gabrielle Quakawoot organised a team of artists to develop a stunning audio-visual display. The artists produced works depicting our local environment. Donna-Maree Robertson created a projected image and sound display giving people who don't normally venture into our forests the opportunity to witness the wildlife that makes Mackay unique.



The display has been shown on several occasions at events such as NAIDOC, the Queensland Youth Orchestra and Global Grooves. On each occasion many volunteers have helped to set up and staff our display and help people learn more about the local environment.

Talking Conservation

Mackay Conservation Group has a partnership with the Mackay Daily Mercury to publish a weekly column on environmental issues. The weekly column is written by staff and volunteers and covers the broad spectrum of environmental concerns that affect our region.

ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

Community Use

Mackay's Environment Centre was purchased with contributions from the community following an extraordinary donation by David Allsop in 1993. MCG uses the centre to hold meetings, training sessions, social gatherings and community education activities. We also make the space available to outside organisations including:

- Mackay and District Turtle Watch
- Whitsunday Coast and Country Greens
- Bicycle Mackay
- Mackay Recreational Fishing Alliance
- GetUp!
- Yuibera Aboriginal Corporation
- Southern Cross University
- The University of Queensland
- Lock the Gate Alliance
- 350.org

The Environment Centre is the first place many people in the community come to if they have an environmental problem, such as inappropriate development, pollution of their drinking water, litter, tree clearing or mine regulation failure. We are able to assist in most cases.

Maintenance

As an old, wooden building, the Environment Centre is prone to a few maintenance problems. The rear roof and gutters had to be replaced this year, which cost around \$16,000. One of the walls also needed repair, costing about \$19,500 for which MCG was fortunate to receive a Qld Government grant from the Gambling Benefit Fund.

REPRESENTATION

Boards & Committees

Mackay Conservation Group had representatives on the following committees and boards during 2015-16:

- Environmental Defenders Office of Northern Queensland
- Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership
- Environment Minister's Roundtable

We also had meetings with:

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
- Dept of Environment and Heritage Protection
- CFMEU Mining Division
- Mackay Regional Council
- Dept of Natural Resources & Mines
- Central Queensland Mine Rehabilitation Group

It is impossible for MCG to be represented on all the committees we are asked to be part of however we welcome interest from members who would like to become more involved in the decision making process.

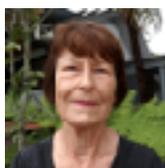
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



President - Dr Michael Williams

Michael has been president of the group since 1991. His leadership has seen the group through times of challenge and celebration. Michael continues to offer generous support to the organisation through his extensive knowledge and guidance.

Vice President - Vacant



Secretary - Dr Joan Fitzsimmons

Joan is a retired biochemist and chemistry teacher who has played many roles in MCG for more than two decades. She has represented the group on committees including Reef Catchments and is a sharp minded advocate.



Treasurer - Judy Stewart

Apart from offering great advice about campaign activities, Judy presents the monthly accounts of the group and keeps us up to date with our financial position and all with a keen sense of humour.



Committee member - Mary Anne Baillie

Mary Anne joined our committee in 2015 and can always be relied upon to make a contribution to the group's activities. Her training in education is a very positive resource for Mackay Conservation Group.



Committee member - Gene Lamont

Gene's quiet, thoughtful approach to decision making makes him a very good person to have on a committee. He has always keen to be part of Mackay Conservation Group's campaigns and events. Gene moved away from Mackay in 2016 and resigned from the committee.



Committee member - Heidi Jarmaine

Heidi's has worked for many years for Mackay Regional Council in a professional role in the field of environmental science after 22 years in a variety of roles in the meat industry. Heidi has a strong interest in social justice and public service. Heidi resigned her position in 2016.



Committee member - Donna Martin

Donna has taken a huge step in becoming very deeply involved in many aspects of the group since joining the committee in 2016. Donna represents the group at meetings of the Health Rivers to Reef partnership. She has a professional background in management.



Committee member - Dougal McLauchlan

Dougal has a strong background in the performing arts. He worked for MCG as coordinator of the Vote for the Reef campaign during the 2016 federal election and was subsequently appointed to the management committee.

KEY VOLUNTEERS



Christine Carlisle

Without Christine's daily input, Mackay Conservation Group would not be nearly as successful as it has been. Whether we need advice on strategic planning, help repairing equipment or someone to putting letters in envelopes, we can always count on her competent and valued assistance.



Tom Curtis

When it comes to nature photography and writing a quirky story, Tom is unsurpassed. His knowledge of the species and ecology of our region is as comprehensive as any. Tom has lent his expertise to our Beautiful Walks especially regarding rehabilitation of the coastal zone.



Pierre Craven

Pierre is a biology teacher and a frequent author of posts on our Facebook page. Pierre was a management committee member in 2014 but now prefers to play a more behind-the-scenes role in MCG.



Gabrielle Quakawoot

Whenever Gabrielle walks in to the environment centre, her bright smile livens up the building. She is a community worker, teacher and an artist and spent many long days preparing our displays.



Tom Rainsford

Tom has played many parts at MCG. Film editor, meeting facilitator, phone canvasser and event assistant. He's always willing to make a contribution whenever we ask. Tom is completing Year 12 this year and will go on to some big achievements in the future.



Judith Wake

A senior environmental science lecturer at Central Queensland University, Judith has been very keen to lend her expertise to our community outreach programs. She has also been assisting the group to find students to undertake research that will further our work.



Daryl Barnes

Daryl has frequently offered his knowledge and equipment to enhance our Beautiful Walks program. He has also helped organise volunteer bird observers to take part in the Eungella Honeyeater surveys we undertake.

There are many more people who assisted throughout the year by turning up at rallies, assisting with community education, conducting and analysing research, cooking and much more. Thank you all.

STAFF



Ellen Roberts

Ellen Roberts managed our organisation for three years until her resignation to take up a position with GetUp in 2015. Ellen's insightful analysis and community organising skills helped MCG take a step to a new level of campaigning.



Patricia Julien

Patricia Julien has been a stalwart of our organisation since the early 2000s. Her competent research ability means that the group has respect in academic and government circles. Patricia takes on many of the challenges that the group encounters.



Tony Fontes

We have a magnificent resource in Tony Fontes, our Great Barrier Reef campaigner. Tony has over 40 years experience in the dive industry and his first hand experience is hard to argue with. He is an imaginative and articulate campaign coordinator.



Peter McCallum

This year we welcomed back Peter McCallum, firstly in 2015 as our Beautiful Walks organiser and then as the group's coordinator after Ellen's departure. Peter is a grass roots organiser with a passion for the environment.



Mereki Wirth

Our cleaner, Mereki Wirth, does so much more than her title suggests. Mereki has worked on everything from establishing our garden to assisting with data analysis. We will miss her when she completes her honours degree in Social Work later this year.



Tom Rainsford

We employed Tom Rainsford as our Beautiful Walks coordinator in 2016. He is an active environmental advocate who is completing Year 12 this year. Tom is one of those people who always volunteers to take on new challenges.



Dougal McLauchlan

We were fortunate to employ Dougal McLauchlan as our Vote for the Reef campaigner during the federal election. We chose Dougal from a pool of highly qualified candidates from around the country. The choice was a sound one and "Doogs" has accepted a role on our management team.



Nick Milum

Nick sought out MCG to undertake a three month internship as part of his studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. When we reviewed Nick's excellent record we were happy to not only accept him as an intern but to provide him with financial support. Our decision was rewarded manifold.