

TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC.

‘Protecting the quality of living on Tamborine Mountain’

Annual Report, September, 2015

2015.....In spite of more than a few life threatening situations, Tamborine Mountain Progress Association finally reached its 100th year. Threats to close us down by not only developers but by Council itself have passed us by, leaving a still robust association tackling not just one court case but two.

Established on 28th May, 1915, TMPA oversaw a gradual evolution of a remote mountain top community into one today proudly displaying a unique lifestyle attributed solely to the vigilance and input by waves of residents not backward in airing their views.

A big birthday party was held in the Zamia Theatre (courtesy Little Theatre) on 14th June. Organized by Hilary Furlong, the afternoon saw several hundred people arrive to join in the celebrations. Besides the mountains of delicious food contributed by many local ladies, visitors enjoyed presentations by the Tamborine Mountain Orchestra whilst participating in many on going activities. TMPA’s impressive history of achievements was presented on the lengthy time line drawn up by Eve Curtis. This was hung up along the wall for easy reading. Native animals joined in the fun (minus the koala who decided this was not for her, and remained at the top of her tree).

And now for the next time span. How long a community organization can last with a secretive Council determined to impose its own distant views on the community is anyone’s guess. There are seven thousand people on Tamborine Mountain, an estimated over 90% have arrived for a particular lifestyle – you’d think someone (besides our elected representatives) would notice us.

The amalgamation of councils throughout the State sent a death knell to smaller communities trying hard to keep their own distinctive identities. Dissatisfaction with councils is spread across the State. Councils now hold many councillors too far removed from some of their shire’s disparate communities. The commitment and care elicited by the election process is not there.

In SRRC we have a batch of less than talented representatives (omitting the mountain reps) happy to ride along with directions from unelected bureaucrats. With no incentive there to understand the mountain community’s expectations for a particular lifestyle, decisions are regularly being made in Council which conflict with mainstream values of mountain residents. The simple solution of following the Planning Scheme has not registered - neither has the idea of paying attention to our mountain representatives on critical issues concerning their divisions. The Planning Scheme, even today, is the best indicator of the aspirations of Tamborine Mountain’s community.

.....and so on to the two court cases, both representing huge costs to both Council and residents – and both due to Director recommendations for approvals despite serious breaches of the Planning Scheme.

Gillion Pty. Ltd. (Power Parade) – commercial water extraction

During the past year the re-submission of this application after yet another court refusal saw further intense activity by many people to have the enterprise rejected. In March, detailed information regarding the mountain’s water problem, plus a pro forma for residents wishing to object to this application appeared in the local papers. Approximately 1,200 people submitted objections. In May, Council once again refused the development application. The decision took only minutes indicating Council couldn’t dump this quick enough, even though they had shown the green light in the first place. This is now a really hot potato.

Predictably, Gillion immediately lodged an appeal in the Planning & Environment Court. TMPA and 108 residents filed as co-Respondents objecting to the Appeal. And there the matter has been sitting for the past two months awaiting a court sanctioned timetable for the case to proceed.

Meanwhile, residents have continued to voice concerns about the numerous other tankers operating day and night and apparently outside the permitted conditions of operation.

With a view to having Tamborine Mountain considered a Ground Water Protection Management area by the State Government, several meetings have been held with representatives of the Director General on behalf of the Minister for Natural Resources. With our two Councillors in the lead we are making some headway. Unfortunately the process is far too slow but other alternatives are not available.

Over the years TMPA has raised this issue with both State and Federal governments to no avail.

To add to the frustration, a letter from the Minister for Natural Resources (in reply to TMPA's) places the problem squarely in Council's lap. "The activity is regulated through the planning scheme administered by the Scenic Rim Regional Council". Had Council followed this, in all probability the Gillion saga would never have started and commercial exploitation of our groundwater resources would never have blown out to the volume we see today.

Guanaba Experience development

This massive development proposal was sprung upon us exactly a year ago. It was difficult to believe such a large extreme sports/business entertainment project could be proposed for a small hilly gorge with landslip and erosion problems. Yet there it stands – threatening to destroy the rich bio-diversity sanctuary so carefully and expensively protected by decades of dedicated people.

Nestled up near St. Bernards Hotel and about three quarters surrounded by residential areas, the proposed high volume 24/7 outdoor entertainment business has alarmed a large number of mountain residents. Problems such as fire risk with 300 people camping per night and noise from screaming and shouting patrons in a gorge which is virtually a sound shell are just some of the concerns. Erosion over a huge network of tracks will no doubt occur and increased traffic along Henri Robert Drive will add to the dangers of this steep mountain road for both residents and the masses of visitors who use it.

TMPA and the Guanaba residents group alerted much of the mountain via a letter box drop. As usual a pro forma was circulated and also published in local papers for ease of reply by the community. Approximately 640 mountain people submitted objections to the proposal. 28 locals supported it.

In the ensuing months a Save Guanaba committee (a sub section of TMPA) met regularly to monitor progress of the application and discuss activities. Rosie O'Brien issued regular detailed updates.

Council approved the development application, with conditions, in May. Council's Senior Planner read out a lengthy report stating why, according to the Planning Scheme, the application should be refused. He then listed the conditions by which all objections could be mitigated. Councillors voted 5/2 to accept the Director's recommendation. The reports by the two mountain Councillors as to why this development application should be refused were ignored.

The 5/2 split in Council is by now a regular occurrence in controversial decision making, particularly where these apply to Tamborine Mountain. Reports and recommendations by the two mountain representatives are being routinely ignored. This suggests off mountain Councillors have narrow perspectives and a cavalier attitude to people to whom they are not electorally accountable. But then, we could just say they had but a few days to scan a lot of material and it is easy to ride along with the bureaucrats' recommendations. This would explain today's loss of what most people would call "local government".

Indeed, at the May Council meeting, the Mayor, John Brent, stated that the planning report was professionally compiled which clearly obliged Councillors to approve it. This style of approach is also supported by the Councillor from Beaudesert who, from her statements, is supportive of any recommendation which comes with conditions that mitigate the risks. Such a lack of understanding of what actually happens as a result of these decisions is astounding. Care and consideration for residents does not come into it.

The Mayor, being top of the pile and on whom the jobs of underlings depend, is clearly able to develop in Council a culture which pays attention to the expectations of the diverse communities in the shire. We would not now be facing the looming battle to save Guanaba.

Guanaba D A.....The conditions set in May by Council were debated with the developer for several months. One of these was a request by the developer to allow increased noise levels from the various activities. Prior to decisions being made, TMPA submitted to Council and to all Councillors an Acoustics Report prepared by an expert which recommended that Council not allow the increase in noise levels.

At the end of August, Council approved the request from the developer apparently without anyone bothering to read the Acoustics Report. It was not mentioned in Council. This then amounted to a final approval of the Guanaba development application with noise levels virtually unrestricted. .

In expectation of this adverse finding, TMPA and the Guanaba group spent a busy three months selecting and engaging a broad range of experts whose preliminary reports encouraged the organization to prepare to appeal Council's decision approving the Guanaba Experience development in the Planning and Environment Court. The Notice of Appeal will soon be lodged by TMPA. Indications are that many residents will be supporting TMPA.

During the year TMPA engaged in several other activities. A submission was made by TMPA to Scenic Rim Regional Council's Draft Biodiversity Strategy. This came out as a beautifully presented illustrated booklet outlining the amazing diversity of the region's abundant flora and fauna. Whilst some people in Council are obviously aware of the region's biodiversity, this did not translate into Council's thinking regarding Guanaba. TMPA's submission underlined this.

Of critical importance to the future of Tamborine Mountain is what emanates from the current re-writing of the Planning Scheme Act. The State Government has scrapped the previous Government's planning legislation so Scenic Rim Regional Council's drafting of the planning scheme has been delayed. New sectional categories now include precincts, and so far the Escarpment Protection Precinct is included. As the mountain's character does not fit neatly in any mould, TMPA will carefully monitor this development especially bearing in mind Council's poor record of holding values not in accord with expectations of the broad mountain community.

TMPA's website continues to interest new people and those interested in our history and current activities. New postings will be added as time allows.

I wish to thank the many people who have helped with the association's activities. Joining me and our hard working Secretary, Jenny Peat, were Stuart Wright, Treasurer, and Management Committee members, Amanda Hay and David Henderson. Then there has been the work done by members of the Guanaba group who attended regular meetings and the residents helping mount the forthcoming Guanaba appeal. Together we hope to make that all-important difference.

Jeanette Lockey.
Hon. Pres. TMPA