

**Newsletter.....May, 2020**

Now that the dust is settling since we've been hit by this deadly pandemic, we can catch up with the other news that has still been struggling along..

As circulated, TMPA meetings, like all other activities, have been closed until further notice. Some items are still popping up and the management committee can deal with these on line. Our national parks have been closed but are now reopened and the closed library is offering only on line services.

**Elections** After a frustrating long wait after 28th March for any results to come from the Electoral Commission, we now know the following results:

Mayor – Greg Christensen

Councillors - Div. 1 – Derek Swanborough; Div. 2 – Jeff McConnell; Div 3 – Virginia West  
Div 4 – Michael Enright; Div 5 – Marshall Chalk; Div 6 – Duncan McInness

What does this mean for Tamborine Mountain?

In some respects it means more of the same. Nigel Waistell's sad expose of council's toxic culture in local papers (*see attached*) influenced his decision not to stand again for Division One. This revealed that not much changed since the major procedural changes which came in with a newly amalgamated council under a new mayor in 2008.

Firstly, thank you Nigel for your unwavering application to serve the mountain community. Hitting your head against a brick wall to do your best for people must have been a truly shattering experience. Enjoy your retirement knowing you did your best job possible.

Prior to his two terms as Division 1 councillor, Nigel had many years association with council issues. He was a long time TMPA treasurer and as a member of the executive played a central role in responding to many council issues which were taken up by TMPA. Acquaintance with the planning schemes, compiling submissions and regularly discussing matters of broad community interest gave Nigel a better view of council matters than a raw recruit. He knew there were problems, but he had faith in his ability to do a good job for the community. As a long serving military officer, the subsequent experience would have been shattering.

Nigel's explanation for his departure from council duties has a history going back three electoral terms.

The distinctive culture of a council flows down mainly from the mayor. Prior to amalgamation when we were part of the Beaudesert Shire, then mayor, Joy Drescher, happily announced at numerous public meetings that she left all local area decisions to her area representatives. Councillors were a then major force in the decision making process.

Up till amalgamation time local government distinguished itself from state government by balancing power pretty well equally between the political arm (councillors) and the bureaucrats. Local government originally aimed at significant local input from communities which had their own diverse aspirations.

The CEO of the then Beaudesert Shire Council had the bright idea of setting up sessions in each of council's departments and sections to illustrate to staff the distinguishing features of the shire's various communities. Then state government announced that Amalgamation was to take place in about six months, so this progressive idea was shelved to prepare for the change.

The new Scenic Rim Regional Council brought in new startling changes, most notably new councillor conduct codes and media protocols. That these were similar to the ones brought in for the new Brisbane City Council is no coincidence. Campbell Newman (BCC) had a close working relationship with Scenic Rim's new mayor, John Brent (previously mayor of Boonah Shire). Indeed the sudden exclusion of many former media rights enjoyed by the Courier Mail was regularly featured by that paper throughout the year.

In the same year, addressing complaints from Tamborine Mountain, state government issued a reprimand to Scenic Rim Council stating it should amend its draconian new rules. Some minor reshuffling occurred, but by and large the effect remained the same. It seems nothing much has changed.

Elected unopposed for Division One that year was Derek Swanborough. Suffice to say Derek's endeavours to represent his community during four years of heightened secrecy, draconian conduct codes, media clampdown and displays of vindictiveness would have been challenging to any councillor, He was further disadvantaged by functioning unsupported. Motions he proposed rarely, if ever, received a seconder in order to proceed. However, Derek's 40 year wealth of council knowledge and experience provided the strength and skills to stick to what he considered to be the right thing to do.

The post amalgamation rules meant that any seemingly simple remark would earn a councillor suspension and a complaint lodged against him. E.g. asked for a comment in his first week of that first term, Derek answered "council will seek legal advice". This apparently innocent statement earned him a two month suspension during which time Tamborine Mountain residents did not have a representative in council sessions. . .

It is easy to understand how Nigel amassed the pile of complaints against him. . Nothing had changed.

TMPA meetings every month in that first term were incredibly lively, to say the least. Derek didn't mince words about how council was operating. For TMPA they were very busy days as we were fighting numerous court battles opposing inappropriate development applications approved by council and even one in which council found itself opposing in court an application it had intended to approve. That Derek had the temerity to attend court to show interest in his community, and then be photographed on the court steps with the lead residents was not well received by council to put it mildly.

## **Media**

During the tumultuous earlier amalgamation years, TMPA kept regular contact with the *Fassifern Guardian*- Boonah's only newspaper. With a highly experienced journalist editor, this paper kept a close account of the amalgamated council's performance. Its articles were far more critical and detailed than what was ever published in The Tamborine Mountain News, then owned by TMPA. (*TMPA sold TMN to the current editor of the Scenic News in 2012.*)

In keeping with its secretive nature, Scenic Rim Council's (now large) media section's releases developed increasing inventive spin which too often presented a picture not quite in keeping with reality. .

Members of the outside media were privy to full council minutes. The TM News had a representative at every council meeting, which meant that our editorial committee could read, decipher & present news just as reported in the minutes, especially how this applied to the mountain. By issuing articles ourselves & not using council's media releases, we struck problems. Our chief editor was told in no uncertain terms we had to publish council's media releases or else council would not put paid ads in the TM News.

The News was produced mainly by volunteers hence profit was not an issue for TMPA. All lean profits went out to the community anyway. Our refusal to publish council's spin meant that council media releases were never published in the Tamborine Mountain News.

So today, whilst TMPA has been in the media background for some years *The Fassifern Guardian* (Boonah's local paper) has obviously kept track of council's performance in the past couple of terms. Their reporting has recently incurred the wrath of the mayor who objected to the paper's direct reporting of council issues. So nothing much changed in this area either. (*See attached*)

Derek will continue writing his columns as before prefixing them with a statement that they are his personal views to block counter measures as before. . In his election article in the *Scenic News*, 25/3/20, Derek, true to form, said "there'll be no secrets; I *will* always let you know exactly what is happening. Derek knows the reasons for the earlier constraints & will be acting accordingly.

### **Planning Scheme**

The new scheme came into effect on 20th March. As stated previously this is a one size fits all document with a number of little inserts scattered throughout relating specifically to Tamborine Mountain. The problem will be identifying all of these when planners are faced with inconsistent local development applications. Still, in the interests of a "shared identity" a one size fits all document is preferred by council regardless of the risks of tangling with communities such as we have on the mountain.

The mayor's published praise of the new planning scheme points out that it was achieved with public consultation. Whilst there were two public consultation periods the submissions by a great many residents concerned about the new dual occupancy inclusion were ignored. Council did some minor tinkering but the main thrust of the document remained. So much for community consultation. .

Mayor, "*I understand it will not be possible to please everyone all of the time. An example of this is Development Planning where council is bound by law to adhere to State Government requirements to provide for forecast population growth*". What other part of the shire has been interested in planning?

There is no indication that council discussed the mountain's growth problems with state government. We have a very basic infrastructure with no reticulated water or sewerage. And the increased potential for future population growth will change the visitor attracting character of the mountain. Did anyone care?

The new Planning Scheme was touted to stop further sub-division on the mountain. Good news. However, endorsed by council on 9th December, 2019, was the Strategic Land Use Planning Programme 2020-2025. This included the preparation of a region wide Growth Management Strategy to commence in 2020. In the new Planning Scheme, sub-division on Tamborine Mountain was put on hold subject to review by the Growth Management Strategy to consider the mountain's role in accommodating regional growth. Housing density, minimum lot sizes, secondary housing and now dual occupancy etc. are potential growth areas and spell dire consequences for Tamborine Mountain. We have calculated a substantial increase in population since dual occupancy further added to the numbers.

Please let our councillors know your opinions regarding population growth. .

.In our general experience with council's planning department there has been a frequent division of opinion regarding the values which apply to this specific region. Not answerable to the community and especially in the recent past, planners have too often been happy to use templates more applicable to anywhere else. The easy option has been to pass an inconsistent D A by adding lots of conditions. These are useless as they are virtually unenforceable. One past planner in rebuffing resident complaints was quoted as saying "if they don't like it they can fight it in the court". Outside consultancies move even further away from knowing and understanding the values that underpin the mountain's unique character

TMPA has often been puzzled by inconsistent planning decisions. In 2019 we asked the mayor & all councillors to explain the passage of two inconsistent D A's. One was passed on flimsy grounds whilst the other was declined with detailed (correct) explanations in relation to the planning scheme. Whilst they all declined to answer as appeals were being lodged, only Nigel answered to say his rationale was that if it was consistent with the Planning Scheme & had local support he would pass it, otherwise no. Simple.

## **Consultancies**

Moving even further away from the intent and concept of local government has been the ever increasing use of outside consultancies. If we've had problems with council's lack of empathy with the mountain's character, outside consultancies exacerbate the problem.

To further diminishing the mountain's character outside certifiers can now approve building applications, with plumbing soon to follow. As with seemingly inconsistent planning applications, one has just to find a compliant outside certifier who often does not have local knowledge and has no need to consider local issues or nearby residents.

One has to wonder what the four hundred plus staff in council do. It would appear there is a lack of required skills for council itself to fulfill its required functions.

## **New council**

Derek is back, running on the single ticket of a move to the Gold Coast. This process will take a long time, probably not before major boundary changes are made in the whole region. However, it does send a signal to council that Tamborine Mountain residents are not happy.

We are sorry to lose Division 2 councillor Nadia O'Carroll, who was the second voice for mountain issues. Thank you Nadia for your dedicated work for your division and the shire. Your sound interpretive skills (laws, plans, etc.) and dedication to the natural environment are greatly appreciated.

The new Division 2 councillor is Jeff McConnell. Division 2 is the mountain's smaller southern section. Also a retired army veteran, Jeff served many years as the Local Controller Scenic Rim SES Unit.

So now we have a new set of elected representatives across the shire and there are early signs that winds of change are blowing in. A good number of councillors now have their eyes firmly fixed on the welfare and aspirations of their own constituents which in the past played second fiddle to the "shire vision". Residents everywhere are mainly interested in their own immediate lifestyles. A shire image is fine for promoting the region but is more applicable to lifting council's image than playing any role in individual aspirations and even their broader activities. The toxic balance of power looks set to change.

Interesting times ahead.

## **Moratorium**

A detailed background to the moratorium, including something about the Power Parade commercial water extraction case was featured in the March newsletter (available on the website).

The study of a further two bore sites to add information to the earlier Todd Report (2011) is continuing and Lisa the PhD student is analyzing this data hoping to complete her thesis early in 2021.

The funding from the state government (\$25,000) will help cover groundwater monitoring costs over the next year. Professor Reading has recruited some students to help with the monitoring, but because of the pandemic she is restricted in what she can do herself. However, she plans to continue groundwater monitoring beyond the current studies.

## **QLGRA**

The Queensland Local Government Reform Association was formed after amalgamations took place when problems for many communities emerged throughout the whole state. Only four councils were allowed to de-amalgamate in spite of large efforts in other regions. Boonah made a strong effort but was unsuccessful and currently the Stanthorpe region is still having a go. These enlarged councils swamped earlier small ones – many working quite satisfactorily. Many communities are now dissatisfied with their giant councils' performances – a further step away from the concept of local government.

QLGRA's activities now closely examine the performance of councils and using political (both sides) and other pipelines they endeavour to get councils to work better. TMPA is a member of QLGRA.

An enquiry into the feasibility of introducing expenditure caps for Queensland local government elections was held at a public hearing in Brisbane (via video conference) on the 23rd April. Joining QLGRA addressing the Economics and Governance Committee were representatives from Brisbane Residents United, Redlands 2030 and Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents.

This collaboration within QLGRA membership groups is proving beneficial to raise the profile of local government reforms and its greater effectiveness in the representation of the people of Queensland...

## **Bins**

Early last year, subsequent to a contract with Scouts Australia, TMPA had two large orange containers placed in the IGA car park for the recycling of certain containers. This was free of charge and confirmation from the Queensland Government Initiative "Containers for change" scheme was obtained.

This venture has steadily brought in modest sums of money all of which TMPA intends to give out to the community. So far donations have been made to Coleman Square kindy and to U3A. More is ready to be distributed once lockdown has been lifted.

## **Membership**

Membership renewals were due on 1st January. We need to remain a viable and functioning organization for the duration of this pandemic. Any issues members and others have can be emailed or posted in. We are especially interested in any development proposals where a notice has been placed on a property.

For those people who have not renewed, subscriptions can be mailed to TMPA, P.O. Box 106 North Tamborine, 4272. Alternatively there is a drop off TMPA box outside (near) Travelling Places, North Tamborine. Otherwise, on line – BSB 484 799, A/c no. 0838 17199 together with your name to identify the deposit. \$15 pa pp. New members are welcome.

Take care and stay safe,

Jeanette

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