

Mr Chairman Ladies and Gentlemen

First I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the country on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past and present.

This is my fourth report to members (hard to believe I know I had to count them up as well!) and I am pleased to say that BMRG has weathered some very disturbed waters over the last twelve months. I am pleased because I think we have done so in a very professional way that reflects well on both the Board and the staff I am fortunate to lead and manage.

There have been challenges, and not everything has gone as well as it could, but overall your organisation is known and acknowledged by our investors as a stable and reliable provider. As Russell has indicated our achievements are not insignificant and I thank our partners across the region for their support in making them happen. As I have said before, we quite simply could not have done it without them.

In my report I note that the changes in funding priorities have had a substantial impact on organisations across our region. Unfortunately I do not see any dramatic increase in funding from government in the near future, if anything the reverse is more likely. With that in mind BMRG will be realigning itself to deliver on those funding streams that have formed the base of our operations. In addition we will be looking at new sources and opportunities that match our vision and mission to provide the investment we know is required. This has been talked about for some time but over the last year our understanding of the needs and expectations of investors has increased markedly as a result of our partnership with Fauna and Flora International Australia. I would like to acknowledge their support – not just financial – of BMRG and our activities. I believe that this will be major driver of activities in our region in coming years.

I believe that the shift to Caring for Our Country and the changes that brought about has actually been beneficial for our organisation. It has forced us to confront the reality of a funding constrained world, at least in terms of government funding.

The reality is that the environment, and natural resources, is increasingly figuring in the operations of businesses locally, nationally and globally. While many focus on the need to trade carbon, there is already an opportunity to lock it away – and the most effective known at the moment is by growing trees. This will have significant, but as yet undefined impacts on our landscapes and communities.

As one of Australia's fifty-six recognised NRM bodies, we are already participating in helping to define how that can be approached. Carbon, like water quality and biodiversity is being incorporated into our economic system in ways that economists have theorised about for decades. Our opportunity, if we choose to take it, is to ensure that this is done in a way that not only enhances our environment and natural resources, but also the livelihoods of the farmers, graziers and other land managers in our region.

We believe that sustainability is not just a word that people are sick of hearing, it is a real, achievable goal – it underpinned our nomination of the Great Sandy Region to UNESCO as a biosphere reserve – it is fundamental to what we do and it sets the direction BMRG is taking. Our task is to make sure that our community understands how it can be achieved and sets about doing it.

Our future is challenging – our traditional sources of funding are more demanding and discerning. Increasingly they are specifying the areas of investment and priorities. As a result, investment proposals have to be tailored to match those requirements yet still deliver the priorities as determined by our communities.

We believe we can rise to this challenge and are readying ourselves for it – I hope you will join us.