

BMRG Annual General Meeting  
Moore Park Beach  
25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

Speech notes for Chairman's report

Apologies:

Cr Ron Dyne, Mayor of Gympie Regional Council  
Ted Sorensen, State Member for Hervey Bay  
Glen Elmes, State Member for Noosa  
Rob Messenger, State Member for Burnett  
Dolly Pratt, State Member for Nanango  
Honourable Warren Truss, Federal Member for Wide Bay  
Cr David Carter, Mayor for South Burnett Regional Council  
Jeff Seeney, State Member for Callide  
Cr Joy Jensen, Mayor of North Burnett Regional Council  
David Gibson, State Member for Gympie  
Cr Bob Abbot, Mayor of Sunshine Coast Regional Council  
Honourable Bruce Scott, Federal Member for Maranoa  
Jack Dempsey, State Member for Bundaberg  
Chris Foley, State Member for Maryborough  
Paul Neville, Federal Member for Hinkler  
Chris Trevor, Federal Member for Flynn  
Cr Tony Perrett, Mayor of Gympie Regional Council  
Cr Paul Lobegier  
Neil McPhillips

Members, as you can see in your copy of the Annual Report, the Burnett Mary Regional Group has again made good progress during the past year.

At our last Annual General Meeting, I predicted that our Group would have to make some changes because of the new arrangements for funding by the Federal Government under its "Caring for our Country" program. These have happened, and I expect more changes in the coming year. The Federal Government is very specific about what it will fund, and all Groups need to adapt if we are to survive.

Despite these changes to our operation, our Group did a very good job for the Federal Government. We developed programs to support landowners called "Healthy Habitats" and "Better Catchments", we delivered the \$1M Supergraze project which helped hundreds of graziers move to more sustainable operations, and the "Reef Rescue" program helped to reduce the effects of sediments and nutrients to the coral reefs and marine environments in our region. I can say with confidence that we did a good job, because the Federal Minister Tony Burke told me directly when he visited Bundaberg earlier this year.

I also said at our last Annual General Meeting that our Group is well on the way to becoming less reliant on government funding. This is only possible because we made two very bold decisions. The first was to establish our commercial arm Earthtrade and the Ecovery Environment Fund and the second was to pursue the Great Sandy Biosphere. I am delighted to report that both of these decisions have proved to be the right decisions. Other natural resource management groups are now following in our footsteps, and I thank the Directors of our Board for showing leadership and maturity and our members for their support.

The environment in our region needs all the help it can get, and we now have the opportunity to create our own future, rather than be directed by the broader priorities of Federal and State governments. I was very disappointed to learn recently that the Australian Government funding for sustainable agriculture this year is only \$5 Million across the entire continent. The government is also spending \$19 M to partially eradicate camels, but of that amount, \$5 Million is being spent on consultation. I can understand why some people say there aren't many votes in controlling pests.

So this is why we have to try big projects like the Great Sandy Biosphere. It was only accepted in May of this year, but has already resulted in extra funds for our region, through our partnerships with Fauna and Flora International, Qantas and other corporate investors. It has also helped to promote our unique environment, with Qantas showing a Biosphere video to passengers on all international flights. I have always believed that private companies are willing to put money into the environment, and in the coming year, we will see more assistance from other companies which will directly help our region.

The Biosphere has also extended the influence of our Group, as earlier this month we formed the Australian Network of Biospheres with plans to extend it to include Asian and Pacific countries. We continue to form ties with Biospheres in the United Kingdom as well as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the largest of its kind in England.

This clearly shows how much the Burnett Mary Regional Group has evolved and changed since it was established, and I know that these changes will continue. We are no longer just a delivery agent for government, and must be quick to seize opportunities when they arise. The recent comment by Minister Garrett that urgent action is needed to protect rare species in the Mary River is one good example. Another opportunity is the availability of excess funds under several national indigenous programs.

On behalf of all the directors of our Group, I thank you for your advice and support during the past 12 months. I appreciate your friendship and encourage you all to stay positive and focused on doing the best that you can for a better environment for our region.