



NORTH TO THE COOK SHIRE...

Executive Officer, Darlene Irvine...

FNQROC Board meeting in Cooktown

The FNQROC Board meeting was held in Cooktown on 6 June 2011. The Cooktown Community Events Centre is something member councils are in awe of (particularly the kitchen!). We also viewed Nature's Powerhouse at the Botanic Gardens and the newly redeveloped Grassy Hill Lookout.

I am a little suspicious of Cook Shire Council winning the barefoot lawn bowls title over FNQROC and Regional Development Australia – do not think we did not notice Cook Shire staff played with their own personalised bowls! I know all in attendance thoroughly enjoyed the bowls and meeting with Cook Shire staff.

Steve Cosatto and Sandra McCormack returned to Cairns via the coast road which enabled them to place the areas so often discussed within FNQROC and FNQ Regional Road Group meetings, including townships of Ayton and Wujal Wujal, and the Woobadda Creek and Bloomfield River crossings.

Meanwhile, Gerard Read and I returned to Cairns via Georgetown and Croydon. We took the opportunity to meet with staff and view the landscape of our two newest member councils.



Board members and FNQROC staff at Grassy Hill Lookout, Cooktown, June 2011.

Two of our staff members unfortunately could not attend the Cooktown trip as they were working hard on meeting timelines for Tablelands Regional Council to develop its biodiversity mapping and associated code for TRC's planning scheme. Travis Sydes and Daniela Gambotto are currently on hard-earned leave after this intense time.

Biodiversity mapping and regional code

It is no easy feat to include Biodiversity into planning schemes. All parties involved should be congratulated for the work they have contributed. With Tablelands Regional Council nearly complete
Cairns
Regional

Council will be next on the list which should be easier given most of the issues should have been resolved.

Broadband for Breakfast/Lunch

Do not miss the breakfast (Cairns) or lunch (Atherton/Mareeba) on 15 July 2011. Information will be placed on the events pages of the Cairns Chamber of Commerce www.mareebachamber.com.au, and Mareeba Chamber of Commerce www.mareebachamber.com.au websites over the next few days.

Tropical Innovation Awards

Nominations closed on 30 June 2011. Judging has commenced and the winners will be announced at a gala event on 12 August 2011. Visit www.tropicalinnovationawards.com for details. If you are able to attend the awards dinner please contact me as I will make a group booking for all council representatives.

Review of FNQROC operations

The consultancy brief has been finalised by CEOs and will be sent out for quotations this month. This review is the first for FNQROC and I am keen to see the independent results and articulate the cost/benefit for councils.

TNQ Regional Economic Plan

The draft plan should be finalised in July 2011 with each council being asked to endorse the document this month for release in August 2011. This is an exciting project which hopefully will see all key partners agree to an economic direction for the region. As the old saying goes "divided we stand, united we fall".

Procurement of Sodium Hypochlorite and Liquid Alum Contract

We had a meeting with the Water Treatment Technical Committee in June to finalise the selection criteria and key performance indicators for the tender and contract. While half the member councils will not see a price reduction we should see indirect benefits such as quarantining of product, increased storage and improved invoicing which will provide a saving to councils as a result of a more targeted contract. The time and effort taken to procure a tailored tender and contract will be well worth it.

We are all working feverously to roll out many of the programs we are undertaking (not all identified here). For more details on these activities please read on.

PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY

Regional Planning and Sustainability Coordinator, Daniela Gambotto...

Biodiversity Overlay Code - Tablelands Regional Council

As mentioned in previous updates, FNQROC has been working closely with Tablelands Regional Council to develop a Biodiversity Mapping overlay and associated code for its new planning scheme. Whilst FNQROC'S Regional Natural Asset Management Coordinator Travis Sydes has been busy working on the mapping side of things, I have been nutting out the intricacies of the code with council Planners.

The challenge here is to develop a code which minimises the impacts of development on areas of high biodiversity significance and enhances connectivity options, whilst trying to achieve the objectives of the Regional Plan. We have been liaising with State Departments throughout the development of the overlay and code to ensure we are on the right track for TRC to get the tick of approval when it comes to the state interest check stage.

Sustainability and Planning Group meetings

This was a busy month with meetings of both FNQROC's Sustainability Group and Planning Group scheduled.

The date for the Sustainability Group meeting happened to coincide with the opening of the recently retro-fitted Gordonvale Community Hall. What a perfect opportunity for the Sustainability Group to come together and see some sustainability in action! The hall had recently undergone an energy efficiency upgrade through the installation of roofing insulation, heat reflective paint and a new awning. This was a result of Cairns Regional Council's successful funding application through Ergon Energy's Envirofund. The launch was followed by our regular meeting with the usual agenda full of sustainability items, including the finalisation of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Mitigation and Action Plan which will be presented at the August FNQROC Board meeting for adoption.



Gordonvale Community Hall

The FNQROC Planners Group meeting was a little more low key, but still an opportunity for staff to exchange ideas and information.

Of particular note was the recent Queensland Coastal Plan training conducted by DERM. The launch of this new plan is likely to have significant implications for Local Government in terms of complexity for development in the coastal zone, and increased responsibilities for local government. Given the short notice provided for the training and the limit of two persons per organisation, the training was not well attended. FNQROC will write to DERM to request greater advanced notice of these important training events in the future.

Another item of interest was the upcoming Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) Planning Symposium. FNQROC approached the Tropical North Queensland branch of PIA after significant interest was shown in relation to a similar event being held in SEQ. PIA TNQ has fortunately jumped on the opportunity to host such an event which will focus on a new era of strategic planning and community engagement in Queensland, with an FNQ flavour. The details of this event are still being refined and more information will be available on the FNQROC website in coming weeks. However, you can feel free to mark 19 August 2011 in your diaries for this planning symposium.

Regional Procurement Coordinator, Steve Cosatto...**Project update - Sodium Hypochlorite and Liquid Alum**

The Water Treatment Technical Committee recently met at Mareeba's Kowa Street Depot where an Evaluation Panel was selected with all councils represented. The discussion surrounded the criteria and KPI's to be associated with the contract. All water treatment units across the region have been experiencing similar service issues. As a ROC we hope to reduce the direct cost of the product to member councils, but just as importantly the indirect costs. One example of indirect cost is managing invoicing and ordering which absorbs half to two-thirds the amount of a staff member's (FTE) role.

As part of the Sodium Hypochlorite and Liquid Alum procurement project I recently toured Cooktown waste water treatment plant, **pictured below**.

**Procurement training**

I attended a Local Buy/LGAQ training workshop for Local Government staff involved in procurement in Brisbane on 3 June 2011. Senior procurement coordinators suggested short courses be developed to a Certificate I or Certificate II equivalent which could be utilised for staff in possession of a corporate credit card or staff who award purchase orders. The courses will provide staff with knowledge of their delegation authorities, responsibilities and consequences not only to themselves, but will also highlight to councils what happens when legislated process is not followed.

Issues to be aware of

Recently an unsuccessful tenderer successfully argued "the definition of Local Content" in a tender selection process via the ACCC. The council in question defined local content as having the address of the head office within the council boundary. The argument the unsuccessful tenderer used was even though its head office was not within the area, it actually employed more locals and had invested more in local infrastructure than the tenderer which scored more points on local content. While this scenario will have more bearing in South East Queensland, nonetheless it should be noted elsewhere.

Probity initiatives

A few NSW councils have started utilising members of the community on various Tender Evaluation Panels under the banner of Community Engagement. Contracts to date have been politically sensitive or related to large spend items. Council advertises an Expression of Interest (EOI) through the normal channels. Members of the public who council officers feel would add value to evaluation panels are encouraged to respond to the EOI (eg media, business owners, concerned residents etc). Council, as with all EOIs, is not bound to proceed with any of the applicants. The community member must acknowledge they are bound by the same guidelines and principles (ie. conflict of interest and confidentiality) as other members of the evaluation panel, and their sole role is only there to evaluate the tender responses. To date the feedback has been positive from community and government.

Regional Natural Asset Management Coordinator, Travis Sydes...**The 'Dirty Dozen' - high biomass grasses on the march in the Far North**

An often overlooked and significant threat to both our productive and ecologically diverse landscapes of the Far North is that posed by high biomass grasses. These grasses are weedy grass species which are able to rapidly and dramatically spread and out-compete both native vegetation and primary production areas. As the title suggests, they are able to produce an extraordinary amount of vegetative matter, often forming dense mono-cultures. Ironically, many of our most significant grassy weeds like Olive hymenachne and gamba grass were introduced as pasture species, which if unable to be contained rapidly spread to adjoining water ways, woodlands and roadsides. Others like grader grass were accidental introductions in contaminated produce or products. Regardless of their means of arriving in Australia or our region, these grasses, sometimes referred to as the 'dirty dozen', are here to stay and provide particular headaches for Local Governments which are often at the forefront of management.

The extended wet season just gone and widespread damage from Tropical Cyclone Yasi has provided ideal growing conditions for grasses in general and species like grader grass, hymenachne, giant rats-tail grass and gamba grass have taken advantage of the situation to boom. As a result land managers are facing increased pressure on resources in order to respond not only to the weed risk of high biomass grasses this year but potentially a high risk fire season as well.



Olive hymenachne (left) threatens northern fisheries by destroying important wetlands. Gamba grass (right, image DEEDI) dramatically increases the threat to life and property by fuelling fires up to eight times more intense than other grasses fires.

High biomass grasses demand a cross-tenure, strategic and highly collaborative approach to management at a regional or cross-regional scale. Local Governments across the region are involved in several key planning initiatives and research programs which are currently underway which will help build our capacity to manage our current problem high biomass grasses, but also hopefully recognise new threats in time. Prevention should always be our first goal in management.

Natural Asset Management Advisory Committee met in Cooktown on 27 May 2011. Key points of discussion were weed spread prevention and the issues of sustaining a regional network of facilities to assist in vehicle and machinery hygiene; potential for the regional procurement of herbicide; progress of Pest Management Plans and alternative mechanisms for the allocation and distribution of resources for managing invasive plants and animals across the region.

Far North Queensland Pest Advisory Forum was hosted by Cook Shire Council and Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Program on 26 May 2011. Presentation topics included “class one weeds management”, “high biomass grasses”, “new selective herbicide for hymenachne” and “progress in specialised vertebrate pest baits”.

National Siam Weed Eradication Program Review. The national program has been underway for more than a decade and will be under the microscope in a national independent review of progress toward the goal of eradication scheduled for August 2011. Many local governments in the Far North make significant contribution to the program and will participate in the review process.

DATE CLAIMERS 2011

The **FNQROC and FNQRRG Meetings** (FNQROC Organiser: Darlene Irvine; FNQRRG Organiser: Gerard Read).

FNQROC	FNQRRG
Monday 8 August 2011, Cairns Local Disaster Coordination Centre, Woree – 10am	Monday 8 August 2011, Cairns Local Disaster Coordination Centre, Woree – 1.30pm
Monday 10 October 2011, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Innisfail – 10am	Monday 10 October 2011, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Innisfail – 1.30pm
Monday 12 December 2011, Cairns Regional Council, Cairns – 10am	Monday 12 December 2011, Cairns Regional Council, Cairns – 1.30pm

FNQ Regional Road Group TC Meetings (FNQRRG TC Organiser: Gerard Read).

Friday 15 July 2011, Tablelands Regional Council, Atherton, 10am

FNQ Procurement Group Meetings (FNQROC Organiser: Steve Cosatto).

To be advised

Natural Asset Management Advisory Committee (NAMAC) Meetings (FNQROC Organiser: Travis Sydes).

Friday 26 August 2011 - Cairns Regional Council

Regional Asset Management Committee Meetings (FNQROC Organiser: Gerard Read).

Thursday 14 July 2011 – Cairns Regional Council

FNQROC Sustainability Group Meetings (FNQROC Organiser: Daniela Gambotto)

Friday 2 September 2011 – Cairns Regional Council

Friday 2 December 2011 – Cairns Regional Council

FNQROC Planning Group Meetings (FNQROC Organiser: Daniela Gambotto)

Friday 19 August 2011 - Cairns

Friday 7 October 2011 – Cairns

Friday 16 December 2011 – Cairns

FNQROC Local Laws Group Meetings (FNQROC Organiser: Darlene Irvine).
 Thursday 30 June 2011 – Cairns

FNQROC CONTACT DETAILS

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Four of the six FNQROC staff members attended the June board meeting in Cooktown. From left, Gerard Read, Steve Cosatto, Darlene Irvine and Sandra McCormack.