



# Coastwatchers

*Eurobodalla's environment group*

20 January 2017

## Coastwatchers 2016-17 Executive Determined at October AGM

The Coastwatchers Committee of Management for 2016-17, was elected at the delayed AGM in October last year. Two changes occurred. Mark Rote became the new Treasurer in place of June Mills, and Joslyn van der Moolen was elected as a Committee member to replace Candice Wirth. June Mills and Candice Wirth both retired and were thanked for their contributions by the President at the meeting

The new Committee is:

President	John Perkins
Vice President	John Stowar
Secretary	Richard Roberts
Treasurer	Mark Rote
Committee	Reina Hill
	Joslyn van der Moolen
	Barbara Roberts.

Joslyn van der Moolen also became the new Public Officer for the Association.

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## Clean Up Australia Day Sunday 5 March 2017

Members are reminded that Clean Up Australia Day is on Sunday 5 March 2017. Last year in the Eurobodalla Shire, 64 cubic meters of rubbish was collected. The Shire Council does not run the event, but assists with pick up and disposal. Volunteers are covered with Public Liability if they have registered with the Clean up Australia Council. Register at:

[www.cleanupaustaliaday.org.au](http://www.cleanupaustaliaday.org.au)

## Pied Oyster Catchers Traditional Nesting Site at the Batemans Bay Marina About to End

The resident Pied Oystercatchers (*Haematopus longirostris*) at the Batemans Bay Marina, have nested on the sand-flats for many years. The species is on the NSW endangered species list. However, their welcome is about to finish, because of their exposure to predators, curious humans, and more development in the area.

Their nesting site is located in one of the most urban parts of Batemans Bay and attracts many visitors. The NPWS guard the site with an electric fence.



The oystercatchers nesting site is on one of the best nesting sand-flats in the local area. It is a supermarket for foraging shorebirds - ideal for pipis, beach worms and crustaceans.

Coastwatchers understands the Development Approval for the dredging of the area east of the marina precinct (in the area of the endangered oystercatchers) had a limitation placed on the duration of the operation so it

could only be carried on during the winter months of June and July, outside the breeding season.

This window was extended to end in September 2016, despite the expert advice contained in the original application. Spring is the start of the breeding season.

The resident pair of Pied Oystercatchers, have had a challenging and sad time over this summer nesting season. A 3 egg nest was laid in late September 2016. 35 days later at the end of October, three chicks hatched.

On the second day these chicks were caught up in textile fencing, which was part of the development works occurring at the Marina site. They were rescued by shorebird volunteers but disappeared the following day. In November, the pair re-nested with a 2 egg nest.



Because of a predators and humans at this site, an electric fence was installed by the NPWS around this nesting area to protect them. If these problems were not bad enough, high tides at hatching time in December came close to destroying the site, and crippled the electric charger through water inundation.

By Christmas only a single Pied Oystercatcher chick had survived. If it continues to survive it will fledge in early February. In the next month it

seems highly unlikely it will survive the curiosity of tourists, the predators, the development work and the destruction of its habitat.



When its time for the Pied Oystercatchers parents to leave, and with an enormous amount of luck take the surviving chick with them, the Batemans Bay Marina may well lose an icon. This species cannot survive in this area, and it is hoped they find an alternate nesting site, despite their homing instincts.

It is an enormous disappointment for those involved in shorebird protection, and this Association, that a condition of the Marina development did not impose a condition requiring the construction of an isolated nesting site island within the Marina development, and that the development work was approved into the nesting season.

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## **National Parks & Wildlife Service Senior Staff to be Downsized**

Over the past few years the NSW Government has embarked on a significant reduction in staff levels of the NPWS to achieve budgetary savings.

The latest annual report for the Office of Environment and Heritage (which includes NPWS) shows the cost of staff redundancies was nearly \$19 million in

2015 and \$10.5 million in 2016.

At the end of 2016, in the latest move to reduce staff levels, it has been announced that senior staffing levels within the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service will be reduced from 14 Regional Managers to 8, with many experienced staff being encouraged to take redundancy.

Most of these Managers have 20-30 years experience, and a number have indicated they will leave the Service and not recontest the new positions.

At the same time as they are reducing costs by staff reductions, the NPWS is searching for commercial revenue opportunities to profit from their unique and special assets, particularly around Sydney Harbour. These sites would include Goat and Shark Island in Sydney Harbour, the Scheyville National Park near Windsor, and Middle Head, with its rich heritage of historic military fortifications. The Service has described Middle Head as a "superb lookout spot in Sydney Harbour National Park" able to be used for "commercial and public events such as live performances, festivals and product launches."

The danger to many is that the commercialization of these Parks will put heritage and conservation priorities at risk as well significantly damage the natural environment, the very reason National Parks were established in the first instance.

Clearly, the Parks and in turn the Government have a financial problem. It has over 850 reserves and parks, and thousands of degrading heritage sites. The current funding level is insufficient to manage and conserve these assets.

But if commercialization comes at the cost of conservation and heritage management and restricted public access, then the policy will be a failure.

Traditionally, most government agencies are entirely ill equipped to operate in a commercial manner. Decision making is inflexible, and there will be an ongoing need for capital expenditure. Commercial operators will require roads and parking area, toilets, electricity, water and sewerage systems, maybe jetties. The cost squeeze will worsen, and some bright MP will ultimately come up with bright idea of selling the Parks, especially around Sydney Harbour.

Governments have to recognize and acknowledge that some things in life are 'public goods' and can only survive with public funding. In the current economic climate with the 'free marketers' in control, that seems an impossible position.

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## **New NSW Coastal Management State Environmental Planning Policy (MC SEPP)**

Earlier this month the Association made a detailed submission to NSW Planning, regarding the Department's recently released draft MC SEPP. The Association supported the thrust of the SEPP, along with a number of recommended changes.

The draft MC SEPP is a vital component of the new *Coastal Management Act 2016*. The planning requirements of this legislation will impact on all future developments in the 'Coastal Zone'.

Whether an individual is involved as a landowner, a developer, a State or Local Government (coastal) official, or conservationist or member of the public, these changes are significant and need to be studied. They will cause confusion until they are understood.

Coastwatchers representative on the Eurobodalla Shire Council's Coastal and

Environmental Management Advisory Committee (CEMAC), Reina Hill, has been involved with the progress of these changes since their conception.

The Association understands the importance of effective coastal management to protect the natural processes that shape the environment, and to maintain public access, amenity and use of coastal areas into the future.

The SEPP gives equal importance to social, economic and environmental interests, and will eventually replace older policies and SEPP's when finalised. The MC SEPP specifies that the 'Coastal Zone', will have four distinct coastal management areas.

- (i) Coastal Wetlands and Littoral Rain Forest Area
- (ii) Coastal Environment Area
- (iii) Coastal Use Area, and the
- (iv) Coastal Vulnerability Area

This allows the specific objectives and diverse environments and interests of each category to be individually managed, each having its own specific development controls. When complete, the mapping overlays for all four management areas will be an extremely useful management tool for planners and approval authorities, in determining development applications for land use within the Coastal Zone.

In the event of any inconsistency between Local Planning controls and the CM SEPP, the CM SEPP will prevail.

The Association will be considering holding a General Meeting in March, with expert speakers to inform members of these changes. A separate notice will be sent out.

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## **A Revised Coastwatchers Website to be Launched Shortly**

It is hoped the new website for the Coastwatchers Association will be launched within a month. The site will be easier to navigate, and generally display only material pertinent to the Association and this region. The aim is to have current information on display. Historic information will be still available in the Archive section.

There will be a "Members Only" section, for which entry will need a password. Minutes of Committee Meetings and General Meetings will be posted in that part of the site for member scrutiny only.

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## **Broulee Planning Proposal and Amendments to the 'Residential Zones DCP' on Public Exhibition**

Members, particularly those who live in the Broulee area, may wish to comment on the proposed Broulee Planning Proposal and Amendments to the 'Residential Zones DCP'.

The changes on exhibition relate to the land bounded by Train Street, George Bass Drive and Broulee Road.

The Public Exhibition period closes on Friday 27 January 2017. The Association is making a submission.

Details can be found at:

<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/public-exhibition/on-exhibition/broulee-planning-proposal-and-dcp-amendments>

## **Closing Down the Hazelwood Power Station**

It was a surprise to many in the community in early November 2016, when the French energy giant Engie (one third owned by the French Government) announced the closure of the Hazelwood Power Station in Victoria. The power station was owned 72% by Engie and 28% by Mitsui, and the announcement indicated it was to be closed on 31 March 2017. The Victorian Government stood back apparently unsurprised. Why – where was the grant to keep it afloat, as there was being offered to keep Alcoa alive at Portland with a \$1.1 billion rescue.

From an environmental point of view, the decision was most welcome. Hazelwood has been considered the dirtiest power station in Australia, it was also close to being the dirtiest power station in the developed world because of the poor quality of the brown coal it burnt. It was nearly 50 years old, and had been supplying annually 20-25% of Victoria's power needs and 5% of Australia's energy demands.

Various press reports indicated that the plant was simply too old, maybe a euphemism for too inefficient. Technological change had by-passed it when the State Government owned it, as it had failed to reinvest and modernize. It was doomed two decades after it was built.

### **Financially Sound**

That said it has been a great financial investment, reaping its owners high returns, firstly because of the low capital value accepted by the State Government in the initial sale relative to its earnings, but more importantly because they could pollute at will, as there was no price on their pollution, no ETS, no carbon tax.

So if it was such a financial success, why close it down?

Two events in Victoria go some way to explain the decision

Recently, Alcoa closed its Aluminum smelter at Geelong. Alcoa also closed its tiny power station at Anglesea, which was a defacto emergency power generator, with a direct transmission line to the smelter as a backup. After its announcement to close the smelter it attempted to sell the power station. However a condition of sale imposed by the Victorian Government was that filters had to be installed to reduce the carbon and sulphur dioxide gases. The cost was to be over \$150 million. There were no buyers so Alcoa was forced to close the power station. It will demolish it, presumably pushing it into the coalmine, then rehabilitate the site. This set a precedent.

The second major event was the fire at the Hazelwood mine on the 9 February 2014, which burnt for over 45 days sending smoke and ash over Morwell and the surrounding district. There were a number of official reports prepared after that fire, which made recommendations for the owner of the mine and the State Government.

Engie when announcing the closure, indicated that owning Hazelwood, did not fit with the clean and green image Engie sought for its long term business model, and that its reputation was being damaged by retaining Hazelwood.

They also indicated that had tried to sell Hazelwood, and like Alcoa could not find a buyer. History seems to be repeating itself.

They also indicated that it was not economic to clean-up the pollution in the power station.

But finding out what clean-up was required and by whom, has proven to be an impossible exercise. And that is where the facts stop. In the future the

full story will become public. It can be speculated that like Alcoa, the Victorian Government may have required filters on the 8 chimneys. If it cost \$150 million for one chimney at Anglesea, and that is for one small chimney, then 8 huge chimneys at Hazelwood, would cost at least \$1.2 billion, but more likely over \$2 billion.

As with Alcoa, if this scenario has merit, then the decision to close Hazelwood would then appear to be logical.

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### **Chief Scientist Alan Finkel's Preliminary Assessment of Renewable Energy**

The Commonwealth Chief scientist Alan Finkel who chairs a five-member panel, presented a preliminary report to the Commonwealth Government on renewable energy, in early December 2016.

He outlined the need for serious and urgent market reform in Australia's energy markets. He said the shift to renewable energy was unstoppable, and was being led by the consumers, not the industry or government. He pointed out that the market structure and supporting policies were not in place to assist this transition.

He noted that consumers were being hit by soaring grid costs, at a time when they have technologies available to reduce their bills. He said these technologies, such as rooftop solar and battery storage, are the "antithesis of the centralised energy model".

The Finkel report calmly notes these changes, and the solutions, in contrast to the defensive claims (for coal) of many politicians. The Report indicates that the lack of policy was a major reason South Australia was caught short in its blackout of September 28 2016 and why other States may also be at risk. He said

the answer is to look forward to new technologies and system designs, not to old centralised thinking.

The Finkel preliminary review highlights the inconvenient truth that Australia's policy settings are lacking and are not sufficient to meet Australia's modest Paris climate targets.

The report notes that the Renewable Energy Target does not extend or act beyond 2020, and its effectiveness has been undermined by policy instability and uncertainty driven by numerous reviews.

It says options exist to reduce emissions. These included the emissions intensity scheme ruled out by the Government in late 2016, and carbon price scrapped by the Abbott Government.

The Finkel review looks at the issue of system security and reliability, particularly in the light of recent events in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. He said systems are available to effectively integrate variable renewable electricity generators into the electricity grid, but the existing systems will have to change.

The Report notes that the transition to a lower emissions economy "cannot be reversed", and residential and commercial consumers are at the centre of this change, with distributed energy resources (such as solar and storage) allowing them to become investors and electricity traders – with or without the National Electricity Market.

Finkel's report has similar conclusions to the findings of recent reports from CSIRO and Energy Networks Australia. These reports suggest that half of all Australia's power needs will come from consumers by 2050.

It is clear the Commonwealth Government needs to get into step.