

**The Coastwatchers Association Inc**  
**Annual General Meeting 2021**  
**President's Report**

Hello members! Thank you for taking the time to read this report, or, if relevant, welcome to the Coastwatchers 2021 AGM.

2020-21 has been an interesting year for Coastwatchers, with a slow beginning, but with momentum ramping up in the latter part of the year and continuing to the present. COVID restrictions have not assisted us!

**Reina Hill** has served continuously on the Coastwatchers committee since 2002-03; she was Vice President from 2010-11 to 2013-14 and in 2018-19, and was President in 2019-20. Due to health reasons, Reina is not nominating to be on the committee for 2021-22, but continues in her role on CEMAC (see below) and remains on the Environment Fund committee.

Reina, the committee has enjoyed your diligence and steady thinking for nineteen years. Your calm presence on the committee will be missed. Many thanks for your valuable and ongoing contribution to Coastwatchers.

**Committee** - Following the 2020 AGM, the committee comprised Gillianne Tedder (vice president), Joslyn van der Moolen (secretary), Mark Rote (treasurer), and ordinary members Derek Anderson and Reina Hill. The position of president remained vacant, as did the position of an additional ordinary member (or two).

In May 2021 Mark Rote became president (as well as treasurer), and two ordinary members were appointed to the committee: Julie Taylor-Mills and Suzanne Gray.

Julie is a member of the board of management of the Nature Conservation Council NSW, a member of WIRES State Council of NSW, is a wildlife carer, has a professional background in corporate environmental management, is actively involved in the application of cultural and ecological burning processes on the South Coast and holds 40 acres of land in Eurobodalla under wildlife covenant with the Biodiversity Conservation Trust. Julie brings to the committee a wealth of experience, perspective and connections.

Suzanne was also on the Mossy Forest Group (see below) but retired from these roles in July as the demands of finishing a PhD precluded her from giving either role what she felt was its due. Thank you Suzanne for your enormous contribution to the Mossy Forest campaign's early days and to the committee.

(Post June 30, the Committee welcomed Niall O'Donnell to the casual vacancy for an ordinary member. Niall is still "learning the ropes", and intends taking a more active role when he feels he has the knowledge to do so.)

**Meetings** - From July 1 2020 to June 30 2021 the Coastwatchers committee met six times, made various decisions by email between meetings and also had two joint meetings with the Mossy Forest Group and Environment Fund committee. (And the committee has met as many times again since June 30th!)

The subcommittees (Forest Working Group, Mossy Forest Group and Environment Fund committee) meet independently of the committee, enabling them to bring their advice, recommendations and proposals to the committee.

The committee and its subcommittees have worked effectively throughout the year, with varied input from all members and an enjoyable spirit of support and collaboration. Many of the meetings have been online due to COVID restrictions, with the result that we actually look forward to our face-to-face meetings!

**Submissions** - Coastwatchers submissions were made to various inquiries this year, including

- Natural Resources Commission Citizen Science Strategy
- Legislative Council inquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the Timber and Forest Products industry
- Briquette and Pallet Plant objection to Bega Valley Council.

These submissions are available to view at [www.coastwatchers.org.au](http://www.coastwatchers.org.au).

**Support Letters** - Campbell Page's "EcoCrews" application for Bushfire Local Economic Recovery funding (15/12/20); SHASA Microgrid grant application (27/1/21); SHASA funding application for coordinator (3/6/21); Batemans Bay Heritage Museum application for Investing in Rural Communities Grant with the Foundation for Regional Renewal and Recovery (June 2021).

**Other correspondence** - Signatory to followup letter and New Year's Eve Open Letter seeking greater Council engagement on climate action - including requesting Council declare a Climate Emergency (9/2/21); Cosignatory ACF Strengthen Nature Laws EPBC letter to Kristy McBain (23/6/21).

**Coastwatchers Environment Fund** - The Fund has had another quiet year following the twin demotivators of the 2019-20 bushfires and COVID-19.

John Hicks (chair) retired from his position in February 2021. Thank you John for your excellent work on the Fund committee since August 2018.

Much work and discussion occurred during May and June within the Fund committee to redefine its role within Coastwatchers, to find a way to enable it to deal with a possible fundraising campaign such as Mossy Forest Matters, and to enable it to be a part of a broader range of conservation activities than in the past. A new online donation form that invites donors to express their (non-binding) preferred area interest was developed, along with a new "budget" mechanism that takes this into account. Work was also done toward finding a legal mechanism to allow refundability of larger donations (eg if a land purchase campaign failed to raise the necessary funds by the deadline), along with tax-deductibility if and when the campaign succeeded.

There was no expenditure from the Fund in 2020-21, but donations received jumped substantially from \$690 in 2019-20 to \$3,185 in 2020-21. A big thank you to all donors!

(Late updates - August: A formal Coastwatchers Environment Fund Committee instrument of delegation was adopted, defining the Fund committee's roles and responsibilities. September: Bill Barker resigned from the Fund committee: many thanks for your thoughtful and helpful contributions since 2018 Bill. Two new appointments were made: Lurline Dillon-Smith and Linda Chapman. Welcome aboard! The Fund Committee now comprises: Mark Rote, Jeff Aschmann, June Mills, Reina Hill, Lurline Dillon-Smith and Linda Chapman. \$600 was spent to support the Forest Working Group's citizen science projects.)

### **Forest Working Group**

A report of the Forest Working Group's activities will be sent separately, therefore I won't list them here. I will simply say that the FWG has been, in large part, the active front of Coastwatchers in recent years. The collaboration with other organisations, both near and far, the development of citizen science initiatives to enforce better compliance of Forestry NSW with relevant regulations, and the contacts and work that now have Coastwatchers about to take on the large and inspiring task of implementing the Great Eastern Ranges initiative on the South Coast, have been impressive in their scope and important in the relevance and standing of Coastwatchers today.

My heartfelt thanks to the enormous amount of work done by the good folks of the Forest Working Group..

**Mossy Forest Group** - The campaign to save Lot 16 Annetts Pde Mossy Point from likely clearing for development ("Mossy Forest Matters") led to the formation of the Mossy Forest Group, initially as an independent group of people, and then, in May 2021, as a Coastwatchers subcommittee.

The model being considered was/is for Coastwatchers to own and protect the land; to be able to carry out similar campaigns in future as a result of what we learn, and for Coastwatchers to eventually mentor other organisations through similar campaigns elsewhere. There was hope that Coastwatchers could partner with WWF to raise funds to purchase the land. An excellent proposal document was prepared by the group and was submitted to WWF on June 11th.

(August update: the WWF employee that had been liaising with us informed us, sadly and reluctantly, that the Mossy Forest campaign was not seen by their board as a priority for funding and therefore WWF would not be able to help us with the purchase of Lot 16.)

The campaign is difficult for several reasons: a lot of money is needed; the price per hectare is very high (this prevents the involvement of large, established land conservancy organisations that operate elsewhere in Australia), and the concept of land ownership worries some within Coastwatchers.

(MFG and the committee are currently looking at options to continue the campaign.)

Many thanks to Courtney, Karen, Linda, and Suzanne for the great efforts you've given in this campaign.

**Eurobodalla Koala Project** - The [Eurobodalla Koala Habitat and Occupancy Report](#) was published in April, which concluded that the potential of the patch studied for low-density

koala revival was confirmed, but with significant caveats in respect of historical clearing, topography, soil fertility and possible future disturbance. The key lessons for the future environmental management of this patch are the maintenance of its landscape-scale connectivity to other habitat patches, and avoidance of further disturbance through increased frequency and intensity of wildfire, urban development or over-intensive agricultural-industry.

The [Eurobodalla Koala Recovery Strategy Revised Edition](#) was launched in draft form in May, at Lot 16 Annetts Pde Mossy Point. (The final version linked above was released in July). At the launch, Keith Joliffe said: "*We chose this location to highlight the fragmentation and connectivity message the strategy emphasises. Mossy Point sits on endangered Coastal Sand Forest, dominated by koala browse species Blackbutt and Bangalay. People might think koalas only lived in remote State Forests and National Parks, but local knowledge tells us they were on Coastal Sand Forest up until the 1950's. The Recovery Strategy is about preserving and rehabilitating habitat right across the Shire.*"

A big thank you to Keith Joliffe, who has co-ordinated the Eurobodalla Koala Project since its beginning in 2011.

**CEMAC** (ESC Coast and Environment Management Advisory Committee) is not a Coastwatchers subcommittee or delegation, but Coastwatchers committee member Reina Hill is on CEMAC, and has been for a number of years. Her role on CEMAC is to represent Natural Resource Management. Reina was nominated by Coastwatchers for that position, but does not represent Coastwatchers as such on CEMAC. CEMAC has been re formed fairly recently, after having been disbanded for some time.

**Dargues Gold Mine** is close to the village of Majors Creek at the top of the Moruya River catchment, and so represents a risk to the ecosystem health of the river, riparian areas, the estuary and potentially nearby coastal areas should there be any significant release of contaminants from the mine. It is important for us to monitor the operation of the mine and its environmental performance, and this is done through Coastwatchers' membership of the Dargues Mine Community Consultative Committee (CCC) The CCC meets quarterly, usually in Majors Creek, and since mining operations have been in progress most meetings have been preceded by a visit to the mine site. These visits focus on the processing plant and water management systems and structures, as these are the areas where the community has most concerns (ie noise, dust, truck movements etc, and water quality and management).

Coastwatchers is represented on the Dargues Mine CCC by Coastwatchers member Stewart Needham, who began in this role in September 2019. (August update: His latest report can be read [here](#).)

**Affiliations and collaborations** - Coastwatchers continues its membership of the Nature Conservation Council NSW, the National Parks Association and the South East Region Conservation Alliance. It also continues to work collaboratively with local groups such as NCMG, SHASA, 350Eurobodalla and A Better Eurobodalla. The Forest Working Group has worked closely over the past year with NPA Milton, Broome State Forest Conservation Group, Canberra Forest Alliance, Zero South East, NCC, SERCA, North-East Forest Alliance and Cansign.

**NCC Regional Conference** - Coastwatchers, Southcoast Health and Sustainability Alliance (SHASA) and South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA) co-hosted the Regional Conference of the Nature Conservation Council NSW at the Batemans Bay Community Centre on 22/5/21, and Coastwatchers' Forest Working Group ran a Forest Tour the following morning. The conference was a great success and an excellent networking opportunity with 100 participants in attendance, and with varied and informative presentations given.

**Finances** - Coastwatchers finances continue to be stable and sound. If the Great Eastern Ranges project proceeds as expected, or the Mossy Forest purchase campaign goes ahead, then Coastwatchers financial activity is set for a major increase. In preparation for this possibility we're trialling cloud-based accounting software (Bkper) to allow collaborative work and better "real-time" access by other committee members to Coastwatchers financial information.

### **Membership**

Membership climbed from 86 on June 30 2020 to 92 on June 30 2021. Following a general downward trend in recent times, the committee is confident that membership numbers will continue to rise for some time.

**Websites** - Coastwatchers' public website ([www.coastwatchers.org.au](http://www.coastwatchers.org.au)) continues to evolve slowly and to amass content. A new Environment Fund donation form shows promise, having received a couple of unsolicited donations from non-members, expressing admiration for the work that Coastwatchers is doing. It also allows the donor to express a preference (non-binding) for the areas of activity in which their donation might be spent.

The Coastwatchers committee website (passworded and not found by search engines) continues to evolve and to serve as a resource and reference for not only the Coastwatchers committee, but access has now been given to all subcommittee members also, to enhance understanding, communication and collaboration.

**Facebook** - Coastwatchers' engagement with its more active members, and the wider community, is enhanced greatly in a dynamic way by its [Facebook page](#). Many thanks to Joslyn, who manages it.

**Google Workspace** - In March 2021 Coastwatchers qualified for free access to Google Workspace for Nonprofits. This helps with collaboration within and outside of Coastwatchers, provides large amounts of free data storage space and helps with email management. It also helps with continuity when committee changes occur, avoiding accidental, history and information loss. It's early days yet - the benefits will probably increase over time.

**Great Eastern Ranges (late news, post June 30)** - Coastwatchers is currently working on an imminent partnership with [Great Eastern Ranges](#) Limited (GER) to implement the South Coast Project. This WWF funded partnership would see Coastwatchers implement the project in the Eurobodalla and the lower Shoalhaven which suffered extensive damage and loss due to the 2019-20 bushfires. We would receive significant funding over three years, to assist landholders to protect, restore and connect habitat across the landscape.

This project fits in well with the aims of Coastwatchers in general, and with the current direction of the Eurobodalla Koala Project.

A Coastwatchers subcommittee called The Great Eastern Ranges Working Group was formed on September 15th, with Keith Joliffe and Joslyn van der Moolen appointed to oversee activities.

**Conclusion** - Still here? Thanks!

I have a natural tendency to find systematic, structural and strategic solutions to problems – I find ad hoc solutions unsettling. Twenty-five years of owning Moruya Bicycles, with my wife Dana, developed my focus on organisational efficiencies. Hence my current focus, as president, on the internal workings of Coastwatchers.

For some time much of the impetus for Coastwatchers' activities has come from within its management committee. While the individuals involved are to be commended, it can be tiring to be involved in administration and management as well as front-line activities. The allocation of some responsibilities between the Coastwatchers committee and the Environment Fund committee was unclear.

When a person is overloaded with too many responsibilities or when poorly defined responsibilities cause uncertainty and inaction, organisational capacity is affected. For Coastwatchers to have good organisational capacity, roles need to be manageable and clearly defined, negotiated and understood, and pathways of responsibility, authority, advice, and money need to be clearly planned, agreed and understood.

I see subcommittees (Mossy Forest Group, Forest Working Group, Eurobodalla Koala Project, Great Eastern Ranges Working Group and maybe others in future) being supported by and empowered by the Coastwatchers committee and the Environment Fund Committee so that they can drive South Coast conservation forward. I see the various parts of Coastwatchers drawing energy and inspiration from their shared successes, increasing membership and a strengthening conservation message on the South Coast as a result. The whole will be greater than the sum of its parts.

Thanks again to all who have contributed to, and continue to contribute to the activities and strength of the conservation message that Coastwatchers delivers.

Mark Rote  
President