

## Port Stephens Marine Park welcomed



map courtesy of the NSW Marine Park Authority

### First step to sustainable fishing and protection

Congratulations to the Port Stephens Eco-Network, the National Parks Association, The Wilderness Society Newcastle, all in the Saltwater Environment Alliance and the Member for Port Stephens Mr John Bartlett for all their hard work contributing to the creation of the Port Stephens – Great Lakes Marine Park.

Covering approximately 97,200 hectares, the Marine Park includes many species of dolphins, seabirds, turtles, fish, seaweeds and is home to threatened species such as Gould's Petrels, Little Terns, the Weedy Sea Dragon and Green Turtles. The Marine Park also includes key aggregation sites for the critically endangered Grey Nurse Sharks at Seal Rocks and Broughton Island. Wallis Lake and South West Rocks are identified key habitat sites that missed out on any protection.

The Marine Park remains a blank canvas for protection until the right mix of multi-use zonings is determined. Over the next six months the Government will be deciding on which areas within the Park warrant full protection in sanctuary zones. The Marine Parks Authority is undertaking a community consultation process to help determine these boundaries. While consultation with all stakeholders is necessary, it is vital that the process is driven by science, not subjectivity, with clear targets set for protection of all habitat types.

The Port Stephens - Great Lakes Marine Park is a great opportunity to protect much of our local marine wildlife. Make sure you have your say over the coming months in helping shape the Park zonings. The Marine Parks Authority can be found at [www.mpa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.mpa.nsw.gov.au)

**The Hunter Advocate will be keeping a close watch on progress towards a good outcome for our marine life and the community.**

A zoning plan is used within marine parks; four zones are used. **Sanctuary** zones allow for total protection of the marine habitat. Activities that involve harming any animal, plant or habitat are prohibited. **Habitat protection** zones allow limited taking of specified fish and plants. Activities that do not have a significant impact on fish populations are permitted. Line fishing, spearfishing and hand gathering are permitted. **General use** zones allow multiple uses. **Special purpose** zones are used when required.

## Frank executes a Right Royal hijack

NSW Planning Minister Mr Frank Sartor's claims of delays by Newcastle City Council in dealing with the Royal Newcastle Hospital site redevelopment are misleading according to Newcastle Councillor Ian McKenzie.

The Minister used these claims to justify taking control of the redevelopment under recent controversial changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.

On November 9 2005, Mr Sartor stated in the NSW Parliament that he had no alternative but to take control of the Royal redevelopment away "because there had been substantial delay since the draft plan was submitted to Newcastle City Council on 22 December 2004". Mr Sartor added that the State Government could not afford "to drag on these projects for years" and the Royal project was "too important to leave it to idle chatter and petty squabbling".

Describing the Minister's claims as "misleading and insulting", Greens Councillor Ian McKenzie said "The future of the Royal site has been unclear ever since the State Government released its Newcastle Hospital strategy back in 1999. It has taken the State Government five years to come to Council with a proposal."

Council officers met with Hunter Health on 1 February 2005 and outlined the legislated planning process which would result in a Development Control Plan being in operation before Christmas 2005. Since then Newcastle Council has adopted the DCP and it commenced on 19 December 2005.

Local residents have been disappointed that the community consultation process managed by Government developer Landcom, wasted months and resulted in no positive changes to their Master Plan.

According to local resident Kath Saunders, a proposal for a park on the ocean-side of the site received more than 2000 signatures in two weeks.



photo by Dave Ryan

The Minister took control of the Royal Newcastle Hospital site before Newcastle City Council officers could report to the elected council on the results of the community consultation. 2000 residents' signatures, collected in less than a fortnight, supported a park on the site.

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### welcome to our 2nd edition

We are a grassroots not-for-profit association offering the Hunter community a voice on issues of concern.

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# editorial

Much of our second edition of *The Hunter Advocate* is concerned with planning: planning for conservation objectives, planning over strategic sites, regional planning, and planning for suburbs and local neighbourhoods.

The creation of the *Port Stephens Marine Park* is evidence of the positive benefits of state government, environmental groups and the community working together to achieve long term strategic ends.

Whilst the Minister for Planning must be congratulated for the release of the *Draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy*, in its present form the blueprint is unsatisfactory. It still leaves the door open for the highly influential property development industry to perpetuate the very ad hoc development the Strategy is intended to prevent. Since 2001 the Property Council of Australia's well-financed Powerhouse Strategy has been designed to exert maximum leverage over governments and communities in relation to development and planning.

Particularly vulnerable is the yet-unprotected *Stockton to Watagans Green Corridor*, increasingly threatened by urban sprawl.

The Minister's hijacking of the *Royal Newcastle Hospital* site is emblematic of the unhealthy and patronising relationship that exists between Sydney Labor and Newcastle. Despite 2,000 residents expressing a clear preference for open space on the ocean side of the large site, the Lord Mayor remains reluctant to articulate a local vision for the most strategic site in the city. The Royal's redevelopment was flagged with the announcement of the Newcastle Hospital Strategy in 1999. Yet five years later, with the Lord Mayor's acquiescence, Council still hadn't prepared a Development Control Plan.

By comparison, the often overlooked communities of Birmingham Gardens, Shortland and Sandgate have devoted a year to developing an innovative *Local Action Plan*. Their concern now is with a lack of support from local and state governments in the realisation of their vision, which if successful would provide a worthwhile model for the roll-out of the state government and council's urban consolidation objectives.

What is consistently evident from these stories is that communities do have visions for their neighbourhoods, city and region. What they need is the support to build healthy community spaces and funding mechanisms to ensure their fruition. Our neighbourhoods are diminished by dollar-driven development which denies the community's positive involvement in decision-making and concerns with environmental sustainability

But as many in the property industry appreciate, our real challenge is to radically rethink the way we design, plan, and build our presently energy wasteful cities. In the month of November, 12 community activists halted the construction of the *Sandgate coal rail flyover*, in protest at the Hunter Valley's contribution to coal-driven climate change. The two hour interruption to work symbolised for many the much greater break required with old style fossil fuel dependence, if human communities are to have any future at all.



## STOP PRESS

### Lord Mayor rapped:

*Clearly limited...display of bias...no options have been considered which improve services... approach weak and incorrectly applied.*

Some of the terms used in Professor Currie's December 2005 Independent Review of the Lower Hunter Transport Working Group's report. Newcastle's Lord Mayor is member of the Group.

## letters

Great to find yourself absorbed in a paper with honest local content. Hope the segment – 'Profile of a Volunteer' – is a regular one? Gives credit to the important profession of volunteering, and gives public praise to these generous people in our community.

S. Roberts  
Dudley

Finally a newspaper that highlights the good news in our local community. As a 'senior cit' I sometimes wonder where the world is at with constant reports of doom and gloom being sold as 'news'. The Hunter Advocate keeps us in touch with the positive things, the good news stories in Newcastle.

C. Tully  
Valentine

hA really is laughing. Congratulations on delivering a paper that will help keep the bastards on their feet and in the street with the people that actually live and work here.

P. Seaques  
Whitebridge

Tom Toogood's article on thinking globally and growing locally makes me look at every unkept, unloved or unnecessarily concreted piece of land with different eyes. The Fig Tree Community Garden report was also inspirational. What Council rules, regulations or other red-tape exist if one wants to start creating edible gardens on nature strips and other community accessible land? Perhaps a future edition could report on this?

M. Keel  
Hamilton

Your story on Ferris Oval at Charlestown was a wonderful write up. My complaint on this topic is that if the Bowling Club can't get Ferris Oval it looks like they will not move to another site. They keep saying that there is not anywhere to move but has the Bowling Club and General Property Trust ever considered the block over near the Charlestown ambulance offices? There they could build a mini club like the one they want to build at Ferris Oval, with underground parking and entry from Dudley Road.

Eric Roddom  
Charlestown

**Thank you for our first letters! It is encouraging to have such a positive and supportive response from the community. We look forward to more input for our next edition.**

## hA first edition launch

The Hunter Advocate was officially launched during the This Is Not Art festival with a diverse range of guests attending, including State MP for Newcastle Mr Bryce Gaudry. The Hunter Advocate would like to thank everyone for attending and showing their support. Special thanks to: Susie Shevels and Brie Stewart for helping to organise the event; our sponsors Tamburlaine Organic Winery, Newcastle University Students Association, CentaCare, The Samaritans, Rosnay Organic Wines and Longbench Café; Ivy and Red Deer White Wolf for performing on the night and Watt Space Gallery.



Also thank you to our first edition writers, advertisers, contributors and readers, with special mention to Bob, Benjamin, Dave, Michael, Greer, Jack, Michele, Lisa, Darrell, Scott, Peter, Kylie, Micky, Sidsel, Asha, Cec, Claire, Kym, Doug, Rachel, Jess, Marcus, Jonathan, Matt, Louisa, Dick, Emma, Esther, Bruce, Lisa, John, Tom, Andrew, Jeremy, Nick, Clea, Craig, Anne, Brad, Cat, Les, Amanda, Geoff, Jane, Susanne, Birgit, Huck, Milly, Brooke and those others.



### request for letters

What do **you think** about the issues raised in this edition?  
Send your comments to:  
**letters@hunteradvocate.com.au**  
or **PO Box 300, Newcastle 2300**

Letters longer than 200 words may be cut; letters already published in other papers will not be considered; pseudonyms are not accepted.

Please include your **Full Name, Address & Phone Number**



**"I have opinions of my own – strong opinions – but I don't always agree with them."**

George W. Bush

## about THEhunterADVOCATE

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We hope to encourage a new community voice in news, information and ideas.

**What issues concern you the most?**

You tell us the issues and, where possible, we will investigate and analyse them for you.

**Send your thoughts to:**  
issues@hunteradvocate.com.au

**One has to ask: who is funding these sojourns to the rainforests of Queensland and back?**

## Big Bob goes troppo

writes Claire Dunn

Federal Member for Paterson Bob Baldwin must be bored. Eight years of talking potholes, unemployment, troublesome young'uns on the streets of the 'Terrace and sucking woodchips out of our local forests.

There's a limit to how excited a politician can get over endless upgrades to Bucketts Way. A man's gotta have more.

Bob seems to have found more in the adventure playground of the wild and untamed Top End, where he has been spending quite a bit of time lately, playing agent provocateur in a classic battle between big business development and conservation.

### Set:

Douglas Shire, Far North Queensland. A dripping, World Heritage listed Daintree rainforest is the backdrop. The crocodile-infested Daintree river snakes down to the sea. A frontier town, a developer's paradise, where the balance between development and conservation is held by a thin thread, or not held at all.

### Main Characters:

**Mike Berwick:** the well-known, popularly-elected mayor of Douglas Shire Council since 1991. Mike is best known around Australia for preventing developers and land speculators from carving up massive tracts of rainforest through the World Heritage listed Daintree. He was recently awarded an Honorary Fellowship with the Planning Institute of Australia.

**Jeff McCloy:** Australian big business and boating identity Jeff McCloy is a Hunter Valley man. He is best known around these parts for his highly controversial development of Green Point, Lake Macquarie in the early 90's.

**Bob Baldwin:** Federal Member for Paterson, good mate with McCloy.

### Plot:

McCloy and Berwick both own barramundi farms in the region. McCloy's application to council to extend his aquaculture venture into the neighbouring wetlands is denied.

In a separate incident, McCloy also applies to council to build a resort in an environmentally sensitive area, and Berwick's casting mayoral vote puts an end to the dream. The plot thickens as Baldwin balloons in, to aid McCloy exercise his Developer's Rights.

On the 17th August this year, on behalf of 'concerned people from my area in the Hunter Valley' (read McCloy), Baldwin tabled in Parliament a 19 page submission he had presented to the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission. The submission contains 16 allegations against the Douglas Shire's mayor outlining corruption, abuse of power, misappropriation of federal funds and conflicts of interest involving council matters and federal funding.

The allegations are leaked to the *Courier Mail* which publishes an exposé on the skirmish. The far north Queensland mayor defends himself against all allegations and threatens legal action against the Member for Paterson. The heat intensifies in the build up to The Wet.



cartoon by Stevie G

In November, Baldwin is spotted once again in the Top End, this time to attend a meeting with his cohort McCloy, as they make representations on the fish farm to the Department of Environment and Heritage.

Lovely to see the Member for Paterson defending his mate from the neighbouring Lake Macquarie electorate so staunchly in far north Queensland.

But he really need not worry too much if McCloy ends up a few fish short of a barrel.

McCloy's recent acquisition of the \$15 million catamaran *Seafaris* to cart the upper echelons of the international charter market around the Top End, should keep him going for awhile.

For John Howard's '**absolutely indefatigable worker for the people of Paterson**', Baldwin is certainly working hard for one particular constituent (who happens to live in a neighbouring electorate). What with all trips up North, the lengthy allegations, the questions in Parliament, the media fire, he must be positively run-off his feet.

One is prompted to question who is funding these sojourns to the rainforests of Queensland and back.

Meanwhile back in Paterson, there is a politician playing truant. The Boeing workers are still on strike coming up to Christmas. People are angry about the industrial relations legislation and those potholes are looming large on Bucketts Way.

Perhaps Baldwin is just following the example of his leader. In a recent trip to the marginal seat of Paterson, Howard spent just ten minutes with the Boeing workers, while giving McCloy a good two hours of his time.

Bob, just before you go completely troppo, could you please phone home and let us all know when you're back to work.

## Cessnock moves on illegal green corridor dumping

Cessnock Council has served a prosecution notice on the owner of the property used over several years for an illegal dumping operation. The action follows the report in the October edition of The Hunter Advocate which highlighted the long delays in acting to stop this illegal practice.

Many community members believed that the original dumping was from a Honeysuckle building site, facilitated by Lake Macquarie City Council's construction arm, CiviLake.

On 10 October 2005, Cessnock Council carried out a site inspection and met with the owner. Council then issued the owner with an infringement notice for "permit land to be used as a waste facility" and a fine of \$1500.

Council sent the owner a letter on 3 November 2005 requiring the owner to submit a site rehabilitation plan and a statement of environmental effects by 2 December 2005.

The Hunter Advocate will keep you posted.



## Grubs clean up Awards

The Garden Grubs from Holy Family Primary School, Merewether recently received the NSW Westpac Landcare Education Award.

The Holy Family School Landcare group has operated for five years. In this short time the school has been transformed from a barren, salt-laden, windswept area to a playground teeming with biodiversity and a school population brimming with enthusiasm and incredible plant propagation knowledge.

Students are taught through innovative programs across all subject areas and are able to put this knowledge into practice in a hands-on way both on and off the school site. Holy Family Aircare project is the Australian winner of the Volvo Adventure Environmental Award which operates in partnership with the United Nations Environment Program.

This school, which has 240 students, has been involved in a remarkable Landcare project. It calculated the number of cars that parents drive to the school, it calculated how many trees would need to be planted each year to absorb the greenhouse gases produced by those cars, and it undertook plant propagation and planting activities. The students have planted more than 20,000 trees in a number of habitats in the Newcastle area.

Holy Family principal Mark Twohill said: "One of the reasons parents come to our school is because of our environmental programs. They make a difference - it's a hands-on approach, because this generation will make some of the big decisions that the world needs to make and our children will be well informed and will know the right decisions."

The school is committed to achieving the highest level of environmental care, while providing a place where the students can learn about the environment.



Laura, Peta, Joel, Ella, Anna, Chloe, Quinn and Alex from the Garden Grubs

photo by Michael Osborne

the **write** stuff

I've always fancied myself as a bit of a writer. The areas of writing that are experiencing the highest growth in sales figures at the moment, are memoir, food, travel and crime writing. Anyway I have this story. It's a true story actually. Really it's my story, it happened to me.

It was back in the 80s. I was travelling through the plains and highlands of Bactria ( see footnote1), that barren cold place at the top of the world stretching across the Himalayas to Mongolia. Isolated, except for a diversity of international peace keeping forces and insurrectionist groups. Of little or no interest to the outside world, other than a couple of major world powers and their sycophants.

I was travelling with a companion who wishes to remain anonymous because of a colourful history. Indeed it was on the proceeds of his sale of some purloined artworks, from an equally un-named Australian entrepreneur, that we found ourselves scuttling across the deserts.

We'd left our last encampment in haste when some suspicious figures entered the village where we were staying. My companion was convinced that they were Australian Federal Police, Interpol, CIA and Seventh Day Adventists rolled into one and insisted we had to hightail it into the wilderness. We found ourselves huddled together in a tent made of yaks skins with a cold wind blowing around us.

After dinner we went to sleep keeping an eye on our guide, who we found out, to our dismay, was previously employed by some Russian organization that he was unclear about. We gathered it was the army. When I woke in the morning my companion lay there beside me, dead. His tsampa had been poisoned.

Tsampa is a common gruel favoured by the tribes who live in this area. It's made from a rough grind of barley (or millet in bad crop years), water and salt. It is particularly unpalatable. Clearly this was the case for my un-named and now dead companion. Anyway I thought there was the seed of a story here and looked round for support in how to get it published, not to mention finished or even started. While there were no Writers' Centres in Bactria I did find one in Newcastle. And now my story begins.

**Footnote 1:** I am using Bactria, which is the term for the ancient country that covered the plains and highlands stretching from northern India through to the Gobi Desert because I in no way wish to insinuate that I was anywhere near Afghanistan during this time – though that's basically where I was. (See footnote 2)

**Footnote 2:** While there I did not meet David Hicks and we did not share a cup of cinnamon tea and a discursive conversation one afternoon as we waited for a bus out of Kabul. The subject of this non-existent conversation did not pertain to any political or religious matters. (See footnote 3)

**Footnote 3:** The guy at the Hunter Writers Centre said that irony (see footnote 4) is one of the important tools in a writers arsenal – not that writers have any weapons other than pen and paper and these are not considered weapons on either domestic or international flights – though one might have delivered a severe paper cut to that stewardess on my last flight to Cairns which she probably deserved.

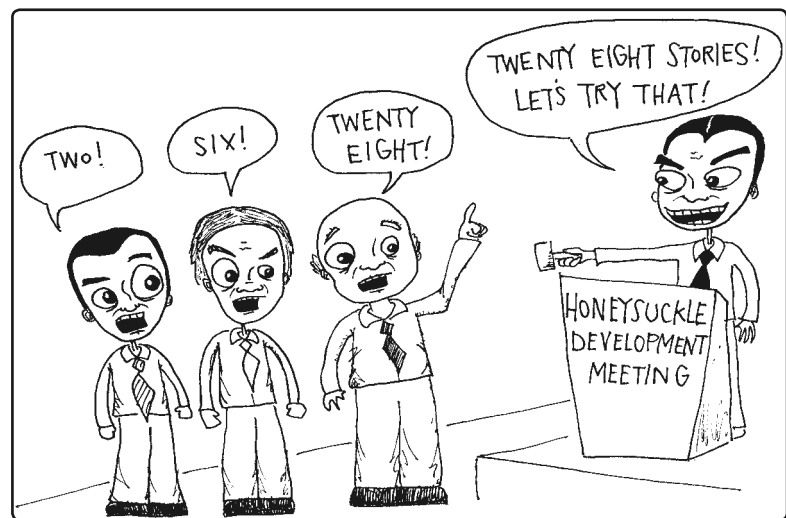
**Footnote 4:** I didn't really understand what he was saying and think he was just taking the piss out of me, I haven't got a clue what irony is. But then neither does Alannis Morissette and she wrote a song about it (see footnote 5).

**Footnote 5:** Not that I am saying Alannis is dumb or anything. I don't want to offend her. Truth be told I don't want to offend anyone – not her, not my un-named now dead travelling companion, our guide, the disgraced Australian entrepreneur, the colourful members of isolated tribes, members of international peace keeping forces and especially the leaders of any governments of major world powers or their sycophants (see footnote 6).

**Footnote 6:** Truth be told – and really I doubt that truth is often told these days – this writing lark might be too fraught. Think I'll stay in my yaks tent. However if you are interested in writing why not contact the Hunter Writers Centre at hwcentre@optusnet.com.au

or phone 4940 0003. Just don't say anything bad about people – especially John Howard.

**PS.** He also said not to use footnotes so this is a PS and not a footnote.



cartoon by Stevie G

the **community conversation**

Our voices are emerging – and they're speaking in the ether worlds. With the advent of the 2005 This Is Not Art (TINA) festival, This Is Not Radio (TIN radio) has begun.

writes Clea Warneminde

In a recent documentary about TIN radio, which aired on Radio National, presenter Brent Clough said: "At first glance, TIN radio is yet another community media voice, clamouring for our brain-width. But scratch the surface and we find a future focused model of hybrid trans-localism...Wi fi, podcasts, streaming, voip, downloadable community audio archives, blog chats and phone pocs are mixed with good old FM transmission - all as channels for the community conversation."

The one month special event licence which TIN was granted for the TINA festival has ended, but community radio is still in Newcastle, only, it's not on your FM or AM dial. It's a new way of listening – its This Is Not Radio.

Listeners access the station via its website, where they can listen live online (called streaming). To do so requires software, which, if not on your computer, is available for free download on the internet.

Readers who may feel daunted by what sounds like a technological challenge should bear in mind the analogy of learning to ride a bike – once you've figured out how to do it, it's as easy as pie – and listening to the radio via web doesn't require quite as much physical co-ordination as handling a two-wheeled contraption.

"Radio is a media that can be open to community involvement and free speech ... it allows people to become active citizens" says Justine Lloyd, the training manager at TIN.

"I think what TIN radio is operating in is this sense of trans-local identity, which is important to people in this era of globalisation -



photo by Meegan Jones

Ned from Zapatismo, Izzy from Combat Wombat & Clea from Zapatismo, in the TIN studio during the special broadcast for the Environment Awareness Raising Festival.

its actually making people's sense of place more and more important rather than the opposite."

For those without internet connections, plans are afoot to broadcast on FM for three months early next year. One of those months would involve a range of events created by the station itself – thus creating the conditions for a special event licence. Jumping over the mixing desk, stepping out from the studio, the station will continue to blur the boundaries between radio and community, merging the two and redefining our understanding of community radio.

As Justine Lloyd puts it: "We're hoping to have a dialogue with the audience and with ourselves".

It's a tech savvy, multi-media engagement that re-invents traditional concepts of hierarchical information dissemination and allows for new possibilities of community to be expressed.

Gill-Scott Heron may have been right when he said "The revolution will not be televised". Turn on, dial up, tune in. The only thing dropping out is a dodgy internet connection.

The Radio National documentary about TIN radio is available for download from their website [www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/nightair](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/nightair).

On offer is an extensive range of programs, from "Gaytastic"- queer issues with a generous serving of 80's pop and anthems; "Ninja radio" youth issues and voices; "Now We Ain't Five" – a program which explores the music its varied guests were listening to as children; a Diva show, which plays the music of women; "Remedia" music and tonics (and music as tonic); "Artwank" which features galleries and also explores the world of sound art; to music specialty shows covering the genres of hip-hop, punk, blues & roots, electronica, local, soul & funk; to shows that are situated on the very forefront of technology: "From Japan" a show recorded in Japan by former Novocastrian residents, another show consisting entirely of downloaded MP3s, and the Stu and Div show, which uses internet voice technology to allow its two presenters, one based in Newcastle and one in Brisbane, to talk and record their show on the web while being in separate cities. At last count there were 60 shows and 100 presenters.

Clea Warneminde is co-presenter of "Zapatismo" the environmental and social justice program on TIN radio. The show airs on Thursdays, 4pm-5pm.

profile of a writer: **Catherine Langoulant**

Manager of Scribe Consulting.

Hunter based writer Catherine Langoulant has recently launched Scribe Consulting, a venture which brings together her personal passion and professional interest in what she calls "people projects".

**What are people projects?**

*That's how I think of my writing work as a Personal Historian; the process of documenting and distilling life stories. As I work with the events and stories in the life of a family, an individual or an endeavour, I'm writing about people and their personal experiences.*

**Where do you find these stories?**

*Compiling a Personal History is a very collaborative process. When someone wants to record what has been significant in their life, they find material everywhere. Particular stories that represent a kind of oral history within a family, or the elusive memories evoked by an old photograph or a press clipping, the stories that shape and describe who we surround us.*

**What inspired you to write as a Personal Historian?**

*People inspire me! I've always loved stories from real life. I suppose a writer is inevitably fascinated with the significance of detail. Finding the relevance and beauty in the small to portray the larger subject is for me both inspiring and challenging. This work is so rich in human detail.*

**What motivates someone to record their personal history?**

*I think it's often a sense of honouring that motivates the desire to create a legacy of one's own life or that of someone close to us. Acknowledging the important people and events of the past becomes an offering to the future, to a sense of continuity and identity. Now that families have become so dispersed, there is less opportunity for the sharing of stories across generations. Perhaps it's that age old social instinct that seeks to impart what's important for posterity.*



photo by Michael Osborne

# Local group plans suburbs' Bright Future

The communities of Shortland, Birmingham Gardens and Sandgate have prepared an Action Plan to guide the future development of their neighbourhoods.

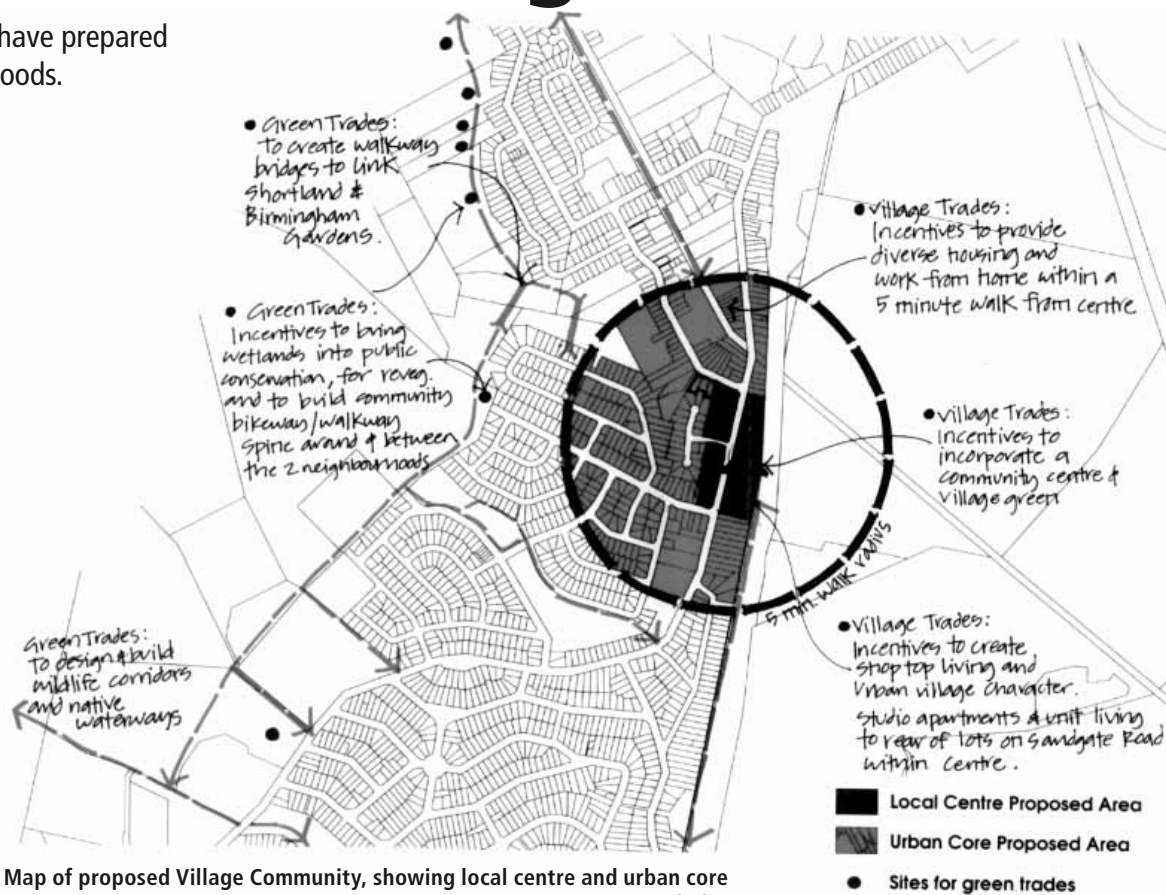
Regenerating the village hub in Sandgate Road, an upgraded system of walkways and cycle paths linking housing with shops, services, parks, the wetlands and now inaccessible public open spaces, are the key elements.

One year in the making and prepared by landscape architect John Mongard for the Community Forum in March 2005, the plan is currently being examined by Newcastle Council officers.

Providing a detailed spatial analysis of the three adjoining suburbs, the report's primary focus is on the steps, partners, resources and timetable that are needed to realize our vision for a more liveable neighbourhood.

Gridlocked by an unfinished state highway, the city's sewerage treatment plant, freight lines for Japanese bound coal, a recycled and perennially unfinished dog track (once home to the unhelpful ambitions of global media baron Rupert Murdoch's rugby league revolution) and with a long history of taking the rest of Newcastle's garbage, the area poses its challenges.

Community Forum Convenor, Greg Heyes is confident there are solutions to our problems, but too often those who can help us, give into more powerful interests, rather than working with local communities to achieve the best outcomes for everyone. Supportive of urban consolidation, he is however concerned that unless carefully planned, the outcomes for neighbourhoods could be disastrous.



continued from page 1



## Royal hijack

The Minister took control of the site before council officers could report to the elected council on the results of community consultation. The site's capital investment value is more than \$100 million with the potential to provide 450 dwellings, Mr Sartor advised Parliament.

According to Newcastle Councillor Michael Osborne "the land east of Pacific Street would make a great people's park, directly opposite Newcastle Beach. The Park would take up 30% of the total Royal Newcastle Hospital site whereas the current hospital buildings take up less than 50% of the site."

Mr Sartor also claimed in Parliament that health services ceased in late 2002. When The Hunter Advocate made a simple phone call to the reception at the Royal Newcastle Hospital, it was advised that the hospital still functions with around 100 beds, serviced by a range of departments including: orthopaedic, dermatology, rheumatology, dental, physio and occupational therapy, urology and the hunter integrated pain service.

Confusion about the future of public hospital sites in Newcastle is nothing new. Six years ago, the State Government's released their Newcastle Strategy which omitted the Mater and the James Fletcher Hospitals. Later \$80 million was promised for the Mater Hospital but the State Government is now committed to a controversial public-private partnership.



Birmingham Garden residents want their green cathedral protected.

## The Green Cathedral

A call for a return to public ownership and rehabilitation of the former Birmingham Gardens infant school land, is a sign of the area's embrace of its environment.

As the Action Plan states we don't have enough seats, shade trees or greenery in our suburb.

According to Sharon Healey, Convenor of Friends of Birmingham Gardens Old School, before its closure in 1995, the school was an integral part of community life. It was a meeting place. With its closure and demolition, something important has been lost.

Locals however remain attached to the site, which provides habitat to a wide range of birds and reptiles, as well as grey gums, spotted gum, stringy and iron bark trees, once common to the area before settlement.

The Group wants the State Government to retain public ownership of its three lots of land, and for Newcastle Council to purchase some of the remaining sites for community enjoyment.

Older locals, watching the younger families move into the suburb would also like to see a small playground built for the children. As Sharon explains, a reminder of the old school's past and a symbol of our neighbourhood's rejuvenation.

### STOP PRESS

At Newcastle Council's meeting of 13 December 2005, Council resolved to meet with the State Government to discuss acquisition, to talk to owners of the other old school lots, to investigate funding opportunities and to report on options for consolidating a public park.

Do you need assistance with ...



### IMMIGRATION?

Our Accredited Migration Agents can assist in all aspects of migration.



### SETTLEMENT, WELFARE & SUPPORT?

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# Work Choices – for whom ?

writes Bob Phillips

I recently interviewed 'Ron', a maintenance fitter who had been employed by an engineering firm in the Hunter Valley. He told me that after working a 12-hour shift he was driving home when his employer phoned, asked him to pick up a spare part, then return to work to install it. He refused, because the extra travelling and work time would have resulted in a 15–16 hour work day and an increased chance of his becoming a micro-sleep victim during the long night drive to his home.

Now that the Howard Government's "Work Choices" industrial relations bill is law, Ron's right to refuse to work such dangerous hours is much more problematic. Detailed analysis of the bill by 150 industrial relations academics indicates that "...a clear effect of the bill will be to further diminish (workers') control over (working hours) and increase pressure for longer hours. Long working hours, and particularly overtime, are themselves serious risks to occupational illness and injury."

Several months later Ron, who had signed a common law contract—a version of the individual workplace agreements which the *Work Choices* law is designed to force on the vast majority of Australian employees—was told by his employer that his job would be restructured. Instead of a five-day week he would have to work four days on and four days off and that he would have to re-apply for the new position.

Because he did not want to work the new roster he contacted his AMWU organiser and asked him to speak to the management on his behalf. Their response was to dismiss him, declaring that he lacked the capacity to do the work. No previous complaints had been made about his "incapacity".

Claiming unfair dismissal, the AMWU listed his case with the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Ron was not reinstated but accepted a settlement, the details of which must be kept confidential.

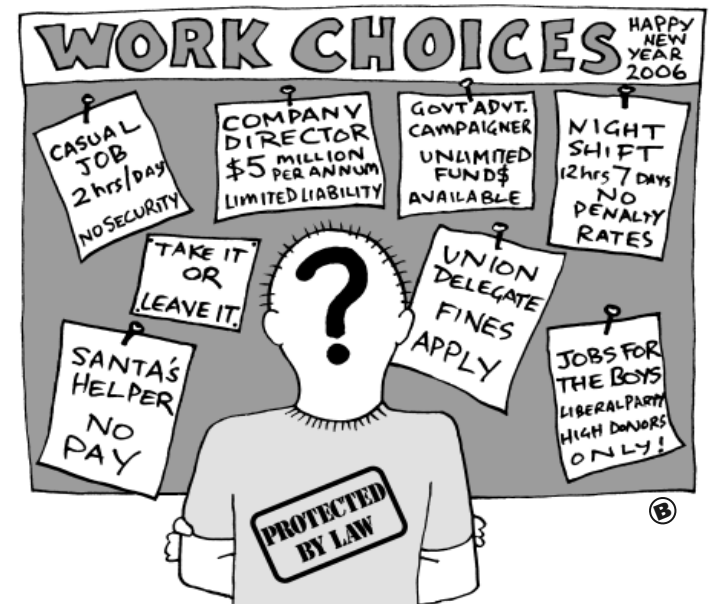
With the *Work Choice* law now passed, Ron's settlement will no longer be possible. Irrespective of his being employed by a large business or one with fewer than 100 employees, without the protection of unfair dismissal laws, his employer may now sack him for "operational reasons".

According to the changes, operational reasons include "economic, technological, structural or similar" reasons. Even if it can be shown that an employee's dismissal is harsh or unjust the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) must rule that his/her case is invalid if one of the other reasons for the dismissal includes "genuine operational reasons".

Compared with workers who belong to the AMWU, those employed in the hospitality and service industries will now fare much worse under *Work Choices*. Union coverage of their workplaces is probably less than 10 per cent and their basic skill levels can be easily acquired.

They are mainly female and young and do not have the knowledge or the negotiating and bargaining skills to confront a shrewd employer. There will be no negotiation. Their employer will require them to sign an AWA he/she has written if they want the job. People who are unemployed, and single mothers who have been forced onto a *Newstart* allowance when their youngest child turns eight, under the new *Welfare to Work* rules, have no choice. Refusing a job will now result in a suspension of their allowance for eight weeks.

Elaine Gibson is an organiser for the liquor division of the *Australian Liquor, Hospitality, and Miscellaneous Workers Union*. She believes that those sections of the *Work Choices* law that restrict union entry to the workplace will make recruiting and the collection of union dues virtually impossible in an industry where casual and shift work prevail. The new rules for making agreements specifically exclude: paid union



meetings, union intervention to resolve disputes, provision for collective bargaining, protection for unfair dismissal, and provision for industrial action during the term of an agreement.

Any organisation seeking to include these matters can be fined \$33,000 and an individual \$6,000.

Many of the clubs and pubs where there are no union members are already operating under individual contracts. Elaine believes that few of these have provided for shift or penalty rates. Such rates, especially those paid for weekend work, make up the difference between a reasonable and an inadequate income for many hospitality workers.

When the new laws are applied and awards expire, many workers, including those in the liquor industry, will be forced to sign AWAs. They cover a bare minimum of conditions: a minimum hourly rate, 10 days' sick leave, four weeks' annual leave (two of which may be cashed out), unpaid parental leave and a maximum 38 hour week. This does not mean hours are limited to 38 per week. They are averaged over a year and employees can be required to work more than 38 hours without overtime payment, unless overtime has been specifically included in their agreement.

It has been a constant theme of the Federal Government's and the Business Council's publicity campaigns that their changes to industrial relations laws will lead to more jobs and greater productivity, but they have produced no legitimate evidence to reinforce their assertions. But there is plenty of empirical evidence to show that wages will be forced down, especially those of low paid workers.

This is precisely the result that those employers represented by *Restaurant and Catering Australia* are anticipating. Their submission to the *Work Choices* Senate inquiry claimed that "...Restaurants, cafes and caterers cannot afford to continue to sustain increases of the magnitude awarded by the AIRC in the safety net (minimum) wage cases of 2003-04-05."

## Australian Oxford Dictionary definitions:

### reforms

– n. removal of faults and abuses, esp. moral, political, or social

### choice

– n. range from which to choose

### simple

– adj. not complicated or elaborate; plain

### fair

– adj. just, equitable

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## The Boeing standoff: what's the end game?

When I interviewed AWU organiser John Boyd, the Boeing strikers at Williamstown had been on the picket line for 185 days. By the time you read this, barring a settlement, that figure could be very close to 200, writes Bob Phillips

A strong sense of injustice has sustained the strikers, as well as their expectation that the common law contract they had signed, once its obvious unfairness was revealed, would be roundly condemned by the Australian community. They are also confident that their fellow workers would support their basic demand for a union-negotiated enterprise agreement if only they were given the chance to express their opinion freely.

That is why they have persistently called for a secret ballot of all the Boeing workers, to test Boeing's assertion that those employees who are not striking are perfectly happy with their individual contracts.

The NSW Industrial Commission has agreed that holding a properly conducted secret ballot would be a reasonable way to facilitate resolution of the dispute, and have

instructed the union and Boeing management to discuss how it should be arranged.

John Boyd told me that after a week of discussions no agreement had been reached on the organisation for the ballot or the date for holding it. The Boeing strikers find it hard to explain Boeing's aversion to ballots in its Australian plants. In the USA Boeing has to obey the law. This compels it to accept ballots in its plants that have favoured union negotiations for collective agreements.

Ironically, the Howard Government, that in its *Work Choices* laws has included the most detailed procedures for secret ballots to be followed by unions proposing a strike, has shown no inclination to support a ballot that could probably end a strike.

Unfortunately, when John Howard's radical industrial relations legislation is implemented, the results of any ballot favouring collective agreements can be ignored by the employer.

At the time of writing Boeing strikers are giving evidence to an inquiry before a full bench of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission. The Commission cannot arbitrate, but it is hearing evidence from the striking workers in an effort to promote a resolution of the dispute.

Whatever the outcome, the Boeing strikers have received enormous material and moral support from the Newcastle community. This is not surprising. It is in line with nation-wide opinion polls showing a majority of Australians disapprove of the *Work Choice* laws.

## public institutions 101—Ombudsman

The word **ombudsman** dates back to 1809 when the Swedish Parliament created an official known as the *Justitie-Ombudsman*. This loosely translates as **citizen's defender**. The first NSW Ombudsman was appointed in 1975. The current Ombudsman is Mr Bruce Barbour.

**The NSW Ombudsman has the power to investigate conduct that is:** illegal, unreasonable, unjust or oppressive, improperly discriminatory, based on improper or irrelevant grounds, based on a mistake of law or fact, otherwise wrong.

**You can complain to the Ombudsman about any of the following:** public sector agencies, local government, the police, community services, workplace child protection, correctional centres, freedom of information, protected disclosures.

The Ombudsman suggests you write first to the agency concerned but if you aren't satisfied you can make a complaint to the Ombudsman. If you do not want to make the complaint yourself, you can ask anyone—a relative, friend, solicitor, welfare worker or anyone else—to complain on your behalf. Your local member of Parliament can also make a complaint for you. **Write to:**

NSW Ombudsman, Level 24, 580 George St, Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone: 02 9286 1000 or toll free 1800 451 524 (outside Sydney metro)  
Fax: 02 9283 2911 Web: [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)  
Email: [nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au)

# Property Council of Australia must lift game

If permitted, the Property Council of Australia would determine the future of the Lower Hunter. It is all in their reports. But whatever we do, let's not forget Bernard, writes **hunterwatch**

**In 2005, the PCA put their members' combined property wealth at \$73 billion in New South Wales alone.**

**In a world in which the effects of global warming are evident almost daily, the PCA's overall achievements to date seem strikingly unimpressive for an organization so accustomed to success.**

Quite simply, we all live in the 'dog eat dog world' of the marketplace. Well according to the Property Council of Australia (PCA). And as the Council regularly reminds its many influential members, only the PCA stands between voracious governments and your bottom line. Yes it's all pretty simple stuff and there to be read in the PCA's *2001 Powerhouse Strategy*.

It's a document worth reading, if only because the PCA have big plans for the future of the Lower Hunter. But more of that later.

In July 2001, national president, Greg Paramor proudly unfurled the PCA's latest weapon in the economic battleground of the increasingly globalised market place. The *Powerhouse Strategy* was designed to improve the returns from property investments, the productivity of property assets and increase business opportunities available to members. Their vision: *To be an integral business ally of its members.* Their Mission: *The Property Council of Australia champions the interest of the property industry.*

PCA's 21st century strategy is not about the survival of the planet, or the creation of harmonious and sustainable cities and neighbourhoods. It's about the advancement of their members' interests in the aggressively combative world of business. As the document states: *Only the fittest are securing favourable government policy outcomes in a ruthless world of competing political agendas... A fighting fund will be established to advance advocacy strategies in areas such as tax planning sustainability and re-branding the image of the property development industry... Resources in this area will be vastly increased over the next three years to fight policy battles.*

Just watch the tap dancing of new NSW Labor Premier, Morris Iemma.

With the fiery words and the extra money, comes quite a political punch. A rising number of PCA members represent international investment companies, cashed-up with billions to invest in the next off-shore opportunity. Facilitating their access to local markets is critical. In 2005 the PCA put their members' combined property wealth at \$73 billion in NSW alone.

## Sustaining self interest

But such is the overwhelming evidence for greenhouse gas emissions, even the declared self interest of the PCA must inevitably incorporate global warming into a business strategy. So not unsurprisingly, *The Powerhouse Strategy* also addressed at length, priorities related to sustainability in a globally warming world.

However, writing in *UPDATE* Newsletter, April 2004, John McCarthy, Interim Chair for the PCA-backed Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ABSEC) admitted: *There's confusion in the industry. No doubt about it... there have been murmurs in the industry suggesting the need for strong national leadership in the implementation of building related sustainability issues.*

Meanwhile, the PCA celebrates the small but worthy advances, such as Lend Lease's green head office in Sydney. But these are the exceptions rather than the rule. New energy rating assessment tools for use in the commercial market flourish. But many in the industry are confused by the range.

Writing for the PCA in November 2004, a perplexed Peter Verwer tried to explain the lack of progress for an organisation now in the business of building sustainable cities. *There were plenty of reasons*, he pined: *Governments don't understand the property sector, the absence of a compelling business case for being green, the proliferation of rating tools, the dearth of factual, empirically rigorous studies that describe the impact of the property sector on the broader environment, the ad hoc approach of councils*, his long list began.

## Bigger picture

Meanwhile, ABSEC'S first president Caroline Pidcoch proposes radical changes to the way we plan and build our cities. Top of her list is a call for a national strategic plan for sustainable city-size, a complete reform of energy utility management, and world leadership in the growth of sustainable energy.

## Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

The PCA's 50 page report *Initiatives for The Lower Hunter - A public discussion paper - The Voice of Leadership* (Jun 05) is all about economic growth, inevitably underpinned by coal fired, greenhouse gas producing electricity.

Virtually every page of the PCA's view of the Lower Hunter's future, relies on fast-tracking decision-making to facilitate their development plans.

The single page devoted to the environment is highly instructive. The transparent heading - *clearer environmental management* - indicates their primary concern is that environmental protection never undermines guaranteed investment certainty in the commercial property market.

The PCA want more of everything for their commercial property sector, including a massive increase in heavy industry and a big lift in infrastructure spending. An extensive industrial lands strategy is also proposed, when more than 7,000 hectares of land is already zoned for industry and State Government planners have estimated that we have enough already for the next 30 years.

For local chairperson Bob Hawes, it's all about *unlocking the [economic] potential of the land*. But in order to get at the land, the PCA wants even more influence over political and administrative decision making.

## Making a loud voice heard

The PCA would have us believe decision-making was stream lined by creating a plethora of panels and committees, which neatly connected the ear of government to the already deafening voice of business. It's quite a list: the Advisory Committee; the Hunter Investment Summit; the Hunter Councils' Business Forum; the Expert Assessment Panels; and a redrawing of council boundaries. It is all part of the PCA's big plan.

Where do elections and democracy and the voice of local people fit into this grand design? It almost reads like a return to the 19th century. No mention though of controversial public/private partnerships for raising capital for infrastructure. Whereby the average tax payer guarantees the private profit of the big corporation doing the job of government.

Plenty of tables too on the projected growth of just about everything. Except the rising rates of biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions.

## Cometh the hour, cometh the man

Readers still awake may recall mention of a man called *Bernard*. In November, the remarkably upbeat Bernard was in Newcastle for the launch of his almost embarrassingly slim monogram *Re-forging the Future - options for the Lower Hunter Region in the 21st Century*. In a bravura performance, Bernard somehow managed to write a chapter on the Lower Hunter's growth drivers of the last 100 years, without ever once mentioning coal. He is a partner with global accounting firm KPMG. He makes big bucks out of advising big corporations where to buy and develop land.

Commissioned by the PCA [and others] Bernard was very clearly in town to talk-up some good old fashioned development. He proposed a 50 year growth plan with top of the range population increases.

But no reference to the November statement of the nation's 30 Catholic bishops. Deeply concerned about greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, they urged Catholics as a matter of conscience to co-operate on facing global warming as one of the major issues of our time. Nor was there any mention of the Governor General's opening address in the same month to a climate change conference in Melbourne. He expressed some alarm that *concern about the environmental problem has steadily declined since 1992 when 75 per cent of Australians expressed concern.*

His conclusion was worthy of his high office:

***We need to ensure the community cares and contributes to the solution.***

**We all have a long, long way to go before our growing city is built on a sustainable basis. Meanwhile we await the PCA's announcement, regarding their revised development plan *Initiatives for the Lower Hunter*, which guarantee their members' commitment to not just slowing, but reversing real greenhouse gas emissions.**

**A clear statement of support for our rapidly diminishing biodiversity is long overdue. The establishment of the Redhead to Galgabba Point Coastal Park and the Stockton to Watagans Green Corridor are two community initiatives that the PCA should be promoting.**

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photos by Greer Allen

## community takes action on climate change

In late November 12 community members halted construction of the Sandgate coal line flyover to raise awareness about the massive contribution of Hunter coal exports to climate change. The flyover will dramatically increase the amount of coal transported to Newcastle Port contributing to community stress around the mines and climate change around the world. Local community group Rising Tide is also organising an event on 22 December at Civic Park to promote renewable energy and a transition to a more sustainable future for the Hunter.

# Happy with your nappy?

It seems to be a taboo subject, and certainly raises strong emotions. It's not politics or religion, but something people have been trying to get to the bottom of for years (pardon the pun). Cloth or disposable? The great nappy debate... something which generates nothing less than deafening silence (in NSW), so it seems. Case closed, or is it? **writes Kate Baker**

**disposables nappies have twice the environmental impact of cloth nappies**

**about 90 per cent of parents in Australia use disposables**

I worked for a number of years in the UK as a Waste Educator for Local Councils, and during that time the evidence for choosing cloth really began piling up. The UK Women's Environment Network was instrumental in lobbying the government to change UK waste legislation and bring in the Waste Minimisation Act (1998). This Act empowers local Councils to actively promote alternatives to wasteful products and services.

It is generally agreed in the UK that a family with one infant in disposables generates 25 black rubbish bags of used nappies per year, about 2000 nappies. Information is somewhat more vague and hard to get hold of here. However, on the Central Coast, council figures consistently suggest that disposable nappies comprise 7 to 8 per cent of residual waste: the fourth highest category of waste after food waste, used cardboard and plastic film.

Interestingly when this topic was raised on the NSW Waste Educators web forum, it was met with howls of 'we're not wasting our time talking about nappies are we?' The facts highlighted were met with vague, unsubstantiated statements by among others, representatives of the Department of Environment and Conservation, such as 'there is no environmental difference' - says who?

What studies have been done in Australia?

And now I am a mum, so perhaps better placed to do my own research on the subject. I am using cloth nappies, and the reasons for this would be down to the information I picked up during my time in the UK.

It is commonly stated that there is very little difference between disposable and reusable nappies in overall environmental impact.

According to the Royal Hospital for Women (RHW) in Melbourne, this is based upon two reports on the life cycles of nappies produced by Procter and Gamble (makers of Pampers nappies) in 1989 and 1990.

An ecological footprinting study commissioned by the UK Environment Agency 2001 found that disposables had twice the environmental impact of wash at home nappies, and 2.5 times more than commercially laundered nappies.

Work at the University of Queensland has indicated that cloth may use more water. However, this depends on what type of machine you have and how you soak and wash them.. Whichever way you look at it, cloth nappies produce a lot less solid waste.

The RHW estimates cloth nappies cost between \$700 and \$1400 per child whereas disposables cost about \$4,000 per child.

A potentially serious health problem associated with disposable nappies is the ease of disease transmission via faeces left on the nappy and then disposed of in regular household waste. More than 100 enteric viruses are excreted in human faeces, including hepatitis and polio (if the live vaccine is used for immunisation) Viruses can live for months creating risks to both landfill workers and contamination of ground water in landfills.



photo by Greer Allen

Choices, choices, choices...

Research into the long-term health impacts of different nappy types is in its infancy. Areas of concern mentioned by the RHW in Melbourne include: the absorbent gels in disposables, raised scrotal temperatures, the contamination of plastics with tributyl tin (TBT), chlorine bleaching of the wood pulp used in nappies and possible respiratory implications such as asthma.

Choice Magazine estimated in 2001 that about 90 per cent of parents in Australia used disposables.

When having my antenatal check-ups, I was surprised by the absence of information about nappy options given to pregnant women.

The numerous 'bounty bags' given out by the hospitals are filled with freebie disposable samples and adverts. Disposable nappies are provided by the hospital when you give birth. In antenatal classes, nothing was said about nappies at all. A midwife told me they used to have leaflets on cloth nappies, but no more.

Even though I had worked with parents showing them how to use the modern style of cloth nappies used in the UK, I had to muddle through ancient baby books from dusty library shelves to work out how to use terry nappies available here.

These days there are lots of different types of cloth nappies available, though mainly via the internet. Major supermarkets do not seem to sell them any more.

However, there is a quiet groundswell of women who are concerned about the lack of information on alternatives. It has been suggested that a virtual Australian Women's Environment Network be formed to put together information for parents to help them make a better informed choice about nappies, and other enviro-health issues. Experience has shown that parents using cloth nappies need education, support and encouragement - and I would agree with that!

If you are interested in joining a virtual Australian Women's Environment Network contact Kate at [kate@hunteradvocate.com.au](mailto:kate@hunteradvocate.com.au)

For more information go to [www.rwh.org.au/wellwomens](http://www.rwh.org.au/wellwomens) or [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au) or [www.wen.org.uk/nappies](http://www.wen.org.uk/nappies)

## deep thoughts

**Interviewer: "Mr Ghandi, what do you think of Western civilisation?"**

**Ghandi: "I think it would be a very good idea."**

Interview with Mohandas "Mahatma" Gandhi

**'Most of the things worth doing in the world had been declared impossible before they were done.'**

Louis D. Brandeis

## profile of a volunteer: Audrey Koosmen

President of the Native Animal Trust Fund.

**Q1. How long have you been volunteering with Native Animal Trust Fund?**

Since 1974.

**Q2. What first inspired you to work for environmental change?**

Watching huge areas of wildlife habitat being destroyed in the early 1970's. I made a goal to change this.

**Q3. What keeps you going in this work?**

My passion for our wonderful native fauna and flora

**Q4. What do you remember as your best moment or best achievement in this work?**

One of the best moments of all my volunteering has been setting free a koala called Cinders from the 1994 wildfires. This was after 11 months of caring for her and then to see her produce a joey. Everyone said she would die or not be released. She lived for many years after her release.

**Q5. Worst moment?**

Standing alongside bulldozers watching prime habitat being removed and I could not stop it, and yet I knew there were animals being killed.

**Q6. What are you working on at the moment?**

So many things. For starters, better animal management, saving our green corridors, and an education programme for our youth involving wildlife and conservation. Also working as Chair of the NSW Wildlife Council to support the needs of all wildlife carers and the native fauna and flora of NSW. I'm fairly busy.

**Q7. What do you find hardest in this work?**

There are many things but seeing some very cruel acts performed against our native fauna is very distressing. The community not being heard as it should is also disappointing.

**Q8. What have you seen as the biggest change in the environment movement in the Hunter?**

Government agencies are now talking to us and our voice is heard loud in the conservation movement after all these years.




**Q9. What would be your advice for a young person thinking about volunteering for the environment?**

Go for it, as you are the future of our fauna and flora, they need you, the environment needs you... Enjoy!

Thanks Audrey!

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# Global Warming... what is to be done?

writes Terry Leahy

Recent research at the University of Newcastle has revealed that people are extremely worried about environmental matters. Yet, they have a number of concerns about environmentalism.

Basically, people are concerned about jobs and the economy. They fear excessive regulation of their personal consumer and leisure choices. They are worried that environmentalists want to force people into an impoverished simpler lifestyle without mod cons and conveniences. Without going into the rights or wrongs of these sentiments, it is clear that it is absolutely necessary to develop solutions that can appeal to the broadest cross-section of the community. A dedicated minority cannot solve these problems on its own.

Government or business action is required to deal with emissions from industry and public institutions. Government action would be a great help in beginning to restructure our energy use and energy industries. On the other hand, a huge part of the carbon dioxide that we produce from burning fossil fuels comes from our own activities. By doing something now, we can actually provide a base level of change. We may hope business and government will match this, as they try to catch up with the demands of consumers and the electorate.

There are a number of changes that can be made which are not vastly disruptive to the current lifestyle of people in rich countries such as Australia. Taken together, these changes would reduce outputs of carbon dioxide from people's private actions by more than 60 per cent.

### Government Action

Personal solutions like this are not enough to solve this problem. We also need effective government action. At the very least to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from private business and public institutions. As well, government action is the key to international cooperation on global warming. The major parties are certainly starting to talk about these issues and some reforms have been put in place. However on any reasonable analysis these moves are somewhat tokenistic.

Under the Coalition Federal Government, Australia is one of the few countries in the world that has not ratified the Kyoto protocol to reduce greenhouse gases. If elected to office, the ALP has promised to ratify the Kyoto protocol. Nevertheless, this is only an agreement to reduce greenhouse gases by 5 per cent – when scientists claim these gases need to be cut by 60 to 80 per cent.

In recognition of this, the NSW Government announced a commitment to 60 per cent reductions by 2050. This is laughable really when one realises that extremely serious problems are already upon us. By 2050 we will be wondering whether we can save our cities and feed people in Australia.

There is even less action on the ground where it counts now. The same NSW government has approved five new gas fired power stations in 2005. Two of these are now being constructed and the other three are planned. This is a considerable expansion of fossil fuel energy in the state. It is hardly the kind of action that one would expect from a party that was seriously committed to doing something about



Newcastle Global Warming graffiti

photo by Michael Osborne

global warming. Adding to this is the rush to export even more coal internationally, as Australia fires up the massive expansion of fossil fuel use in the growing economies of India and China.

It seems certain that Australian politicians do not believe that the public is seriously concerned about this problem. Nothing short of a substantial change in the political behaviour of Australians will make much difference to their outlook on this.

Terry Leahy is a senior lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at the Newcastle University. With his colleague John Gow, he has recently completed a study of attitudes to the environment and environmental politics in the Hunter Region.

**By buying green energy people can cut their household production of greenhouse gases to virtually nothing.**

## what you can do to make a difference

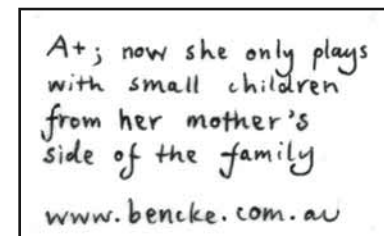
- 1. Live closer to work.** Many people live a long way from their work. They usually drive to work rather than using a bike or public transport. Making a choice to live closer to work could cut this use of fuel considerably.
- 2. A much smaller car.** Most people in Australia drive cars with engine capacities between 2000 and 4000 ccs. By cutting the size of their cars to those with engine capacities of less than 1000 ccs people could cut their emissions from transport by more than 60 per cent without spending any more than they do now and without any significant change in their current lifestyles.
- 3. A solar hot water system.** Using electricity from coal fired power plants for heating and cooling is the biggest producer of greenhouse gases in households. Gas heaters and hot water systems are also a problem. Air conditioners, fridges, hot water services, heaters, washing machines, dryers and dishwashers are the key appliances to watch. Anything that can cut down on the use or number of these appliances can make major savings in power. For example, washing all clothes in cold water and drying them in the sun.

Changing to a solar hot water system can reduce household carbon dioxide emissions by 30 per cent. It will cost about \$3000 to install. People will save the extra money over the life of the hot water service, but there is no getting away from the initial expense

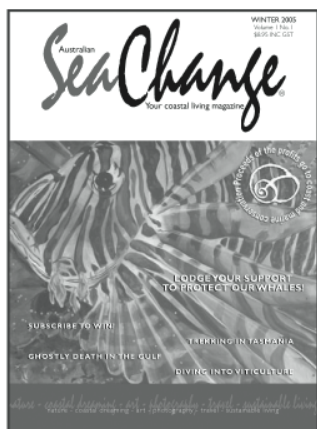
- 4. Green energy.** Most energy companies offer people the option of green energy – for example Origin, Energy Australia and AGL. The idea behind these schemes is that the company agrees to buy sustainable energy (not from fossil fuels) and put it into the grid for you. The amount of electricity you use is the amount they will buy from sustainable sources. The easiest thing to do is to go on the net or ring these companies and see what is available.

Some of these schemes are cost neutral but most involve the customer paying up to 150 per cent of what it costs for energy from coal-fired power plants. This is not extortion; it actually costs more to get energy from most sustainable energy sources – solar, wind power and so on. By buying green energy people can cut their household production of greenhouse gases to virtually nothing. The money spent will also be an investment in research to make sustainable energy cheaper and more efficient.

**The easiest thing to do is to go on the net or ring these companies and see what is available.**



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# State Government finally releases draft

## Strategy on exhibition

The State Government has released a development plan for the Lower Hunter that covers the next 25 years.

The purpose of the Strategy is to ensure that adequate land is available for development to accommodate the projected population. The strategy once finalised will guide local planning in the five local government areas of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Maitland and Cessnock, and inform decisions on the delivery of services and infrastructure in those regions. It will be reviewed every five years with public and government involvement.

The Strategy recognises that the Lower Hunter is the sixth largest urban area in Australia and is a major centre for NSW's economic activity. The Strategy also notes that the area's population and development is expected to continue to grow as people are attracted by its lifestyle and opportunities.

The draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy outlines plans for the region's housing, employment, natural resources and rural communities over the next 25 years.

The strategy aims to put housing and jobs in the appropriate locations and to ensure the region grows over the next two decades.

The draft Strategy is on exhibition at the Department of Planning until 20 January 2006. Copies can be obtained from the Department of Planning at Suite 6, 464 King Street, Newcastle West. Telephone: 02 4929 4346



## What the community says

This is the Strategy you have when you're not having a Strategy, writes James Ryan

Well finally the draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy has been released and the public can see what all the fuss has been about.

The Strategy has identified seven areas which will be developed with more than 2,000 houses, and 20 smaller areas which will accommodate less than 2,000 houses.

There have been different reactions to the Strategy – one from the public and community groups and another from the property development industry.

The first reaction, and the one that has received the most media attention, has been *where is the infrastructure?* Most of us would agree with this sentiment. We are sick of new residential subdivisions occurring without the co-ordinated provision of public transport and school facilities (not to mention health care).

The **big** question is: if the developers of all these designated areas decide to get in first how will Hunter Health, Hunter Water, the RTA, State Rail and the Education Department be able to respond and service every area? The answer, of course, is they won't, and the people of the Hunter will again be left with under serviced greenfield development.

It is vital therefore that areas nominated for development are placed in a priority list to be developed sequentially and are only developed when the infrastructure of railway services, water and schools have been planned and provided. In this time of rising fuel costs efficient rail transport will become such an important part of equitable communities that areas such as Medowie, Raymond Terrace North, Rathmines and Cooranbong, which have no rail services and no hope of ever having them, need to be dropped from the proposed Strategy.

The property development industry has reacted as you would predict, by lobbying furiously to have the backdoor left open for development outside the Strategy (so far they have been successful), and by producing another report to suggest the Hunter needs up to another 261,000 homes on 13,000 hectares of land.

This latest report suggests that the Hunter will become populated by those seeking 'a sanctuary from the harsh and unforgiving metropolitan environment of Sydney.' It seems to me to reach a very similar conclusion to the last 'report' on the Lower Hunter by the Property Council of Australia – *Hunter Chapter* – which supported a population increase of 280,000 people and suggested 13,000 of land to be needed to accommodate them.

But let's be clear about this. The two credible sources on population growth in the Hunter, who don't have a vested interest in selling land, (Department of Planning Demographers and Dr Phillip O'Neill from the University of Newcastle) have both suggested 'normal' population growth of 95,000 people over 25 years, with the Department of Planning suggesting a figure of up to 125,000 under a high growth scenario.

So who should we believe? The developers or the demographers? If we need more land in 25 years time let's wait until that time is a little closer and the trends clearer. In the meantime we can build up our infrastructure and improve our rail services.

What has surprised the conservation movement the most is the extent to which the State Government is proposing to leave the back door open to developers. It is doing this by saying development outside the Strategy will be considered if it meets a 'sustainability' test. Well I haven't met a developer yet who didn't claim their development was sustainable.

The incredible audacity of a State Government to put forward a plan that seeks to bring order and cohesiveness to the way in which the Lower Hunter develops, and in the same breath tell us that the State Government won't stick to the plan, is simply breathtaking.

It amazes me that the State Government pays so much attention to property developers. After all they are only a very small number of people backed up by their paid consultants and lobbyists. It is the people and community of the Hunter that counts.

If the property developers want certainty, that's fine give it to them. But also give certainty to the people of the Hunter Valley as well. If the property developers are to be given guarantees of where they can develop – then we should also be given guarantees where they can't develop and that is sorely lacking in this Strategy. We want our green spaces left alone – we don't want to become like western Sydney.

The community of the Hunter has asked for further National Parks to be set aside and for development to occur as much as possible adjacent to railway stations. Neither of these aspirations has been achieved by this draft Strategy yet developers have been given certainty and the opportunity of more to follow. This is neither acceptable nor in the best interest of the Lower Hunter.

Let your view be known to the Department of Planning, email them at [hunter@dipnr.nsw.gov.au](mailto:hunter@dipnr.nsw.gov.au) and most importantly write to your State MP. (Ed. Please see page 19 for a full listing of your representatives.)

James Ryan is a Greens Councillor on Cessnock Council.

**What has surprised the most is the extent to which the State Government is proposing to leave the back door open to developers.**

**If we need more land in 25 years time let's wait until that time is a little closer and the trends clearer.**

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# Lower Hunter development strategy

## Community initiative

A coalition of 50 community and environment groups are seeking to protect biodiversity and green space corridors in the Lower Hunter Valley, writes Michael Osborne.

The groups want the areas protected to retain important habitat for a diverse range of species, to help sustain local fishing and tourism industries, to provide long term scenic values and community recreation opportunities and to ensure their continuing contribution to the quality of life of the region's communities.

The Green Corridor Coalition have received encouraging support from local State MPs whose electorates are within the area.

The Green Corridor Coalition's prime objective is to see the ecological values (the interactions of plant and animal life, water and nutrients) maintained within the identified corridor between Stockton Bight and the Watagans, including the connecting landscapes around Lake Macquarie to Wallarah Peninsula, north to Port Stephens through Tomago Sandbeds and west to the forests of Cessnock. There is broad community support for this initiative, which is being planned in conjunction with local Council urban green corridor strategies.

The 50 community and environment groups want the NSW Government to put all the Lower Hunter Green Corridors under the protection of lands covered by the National Parks and Wildlife Act and to prepare an integrated Management Plan to protect and manage these areas into the future.



photo by Michael Osborne

Brian Purdue, convener of the Green Corridor Coalition, and campaigner to save the Tank Paddock

### The green corridors of the Lower Hunter need protection

The spine of the Green Corridors is nearly 20,000 hectares and has been identified as part of the iconic Stockton to Watagans Park proposal. This proposal includes over 3,000 ha of coastal wetlands and several Nature Reserves that protect species listed under international treaties. This widely-supported park proposal also contains important coastal and hinterland forests that includes scenic escarpment, biodiversity and recreation values. The majority of this corridor is currently owned by the local, state or federal governments. There are connections to the south and east of Lake Macquarie, including from the Watagans to the Wallarah Peninsula. This area of remnant forest, woodlands and wetlands has been recognised by the community and the government for over 30 years. Some of this land, at Nine Mile Beach, has already been acquired by the Government and protected in a State Park. The connection north to Port Stephens extends through the Tomago Sandbeds Crown Reserves to the Wallaroo State Forest while the connections west to the current Werakata National Park near Cessnock includes significant bushland earmarked for the controversial HEZ industrial development.

### Urban sprawl creeps up on unprotected green corridor

The draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy promotes more housing on the edge of the Green Corridor without offering any protection for this critical biodiversity corridor,

says **Brian Purdue** convener of the Green Corridor Coalition.



The Dan Land and the Local Habitat Corridor (see centre of adjoining map) are targeted by developers for housing.

"This area connects the Green Corridor to the newly-gazetted Blue Gum Hills Regional Park and should be protected", said Mr Brian Purdue, convener of the Green Corridor Coalition.

"Creating parks in isolation does little to protect biodiversity, what is needed is connectivity across the landscape. After years of public debates and consultants reports we still have no commitment from the State Government for the establishment of the Green Corridor Park."

The bushland area in the map shown as Fletcher was rezoned years ago and is currently being developed for housing.

The Planning Minister, Mr Sartor has recently taken over planning approval for the Dan Land.

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**The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** - C.S. Lewis' beloved children's series comes to the big screen in a sumptuous effects extravaganza. Four children find another world on the other side of the wardrobe, where they must free it from the grip of the evil White Witch. Aiding them is Aslan, the Lion God of Narnia. Widely considered an allegory of Christianity, expect the series of seven to follow if this is a hit.

**The Legend of Zorro** - Antonio Banderas and Catherine Zeta-Jones join forces again with director Martin Campbell in the sequel to 1998's *Mask of Zorro*. A retired Zorro is forced to once again don the mask and wield the sword to save his family and his country. More swashbuckling and equestrian stunts, in other words.

**Broken Flowers** - The 2005 Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix award winner, starring Bill Murray traces the source of a mysterious letter that claims he has a nineteen year old son. He tracks down former lovers as he confronts his past and present. Bill Murray has been on a roll since *Groundhog Day*, and this seems to be no exception.

January

**Chicken Little** - Disney takes on the 3-D animation challenge with the Fractured Fairytale version of *Chicken Little*. There's a cozy ten minutes. Add in the usual Disney subplot misfit makes good and an alien invasion to get a feature film. Kids will undoubtedly love it and want to buy all the merchandise. Sprinkle in some jokes for the adults, simmer and stir. Pixar still rules the roost.

**Memoirs of a Geisha** - Based on the best-selling novel by Arthur Golden, *Memoirs* tells the story of Nitta Sayuri, a poor fisherman's daughter sold to a Geisha house in 1920's Japan, who goes on to become one of the country's most celebrated geisha in the lead-up to World War 2. Rob Marshall (*Chicago*) directs Ziyi Zhang, Michelle Yeoh and Gong Li. Who are Chinese. At least they can act.

**The Producers** - The film of the hit stage musical of the original film of Mel Brooks' *The Producers*. This time Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane are Milo Bloom and Max Bialystock with a get rich quick scheme - produce the worst musical the world has ever seen, *'Springtime for Hitler'*. The stage version was critically lauded and the original is one of Mel Brooks' best, so this should be a winner.

**Munich** - Steven Spielberg directs Eric Bana in this tale of the 1972 Munich Olympics, when eleven Israeli athletes were taken hostage and killed by Black September, a Palestinian terrorist organisation. Bana plays the leader of the Mossad group sent to track Black September down. Also stars new James Bond Daniel Craig, with Geoffrey Rush rounding out the Aussie contingent. Another Spielberg 'message' movie with Oscars written all over it.

**Brokeback Mountain** - Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal (*Donnie Darko*) star in Ang Lee's adaptation of the E. Annie Proulx short story. Two young cowboys, a ranch hand and a rodeo cowboy, meet in the Wyoming high grasslands and unexpectedly form a powerful bond. Winner of this year's Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival, it is also one of the Oscar forerunners. Ang Lee's eye for scenery (both outdoors and human), should ensure everybody has something to drool about.



Playing at the Peats Ridge Sustainable Art and Music Festival

photo by Michael Osborne

Red Deer White Wolf

Red Deer White Wolf combines the sounds of blues, roots and jazz inspired by hippy love and the earth. Listening to their soulful rhythms will provoke spirited dancing that show the world as beautiful. Red Deer White Wolf are playing at The Brewery on 12 January with Coral. This will be the last Newcastle gig before they go on tour to share their sounds up the coast.

film review

Harry Potter & The Goblet of Fire

Fans of Harry Potter will be rejoicing everywhere - even though it's only been 18 months or so since the third Harry Potter film, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, graced the big screen, film number four is out and the fifth is brewing for a 2007 release.

J.K. Rowling's tales of coming-of-age boy-wizardry have captured the hearts and minds of children and adults alike all over the world, and it's no surprise that the previous Harry Potter films are amongst the highest grossing films ever.

And like a fine wine the movies keep getting better and better. *The Philosopher's Stone* was pretty good. *Chamber of Secrets* was better. *The Prisoner of Azkaban* was great. And now the fourth film, *The Goblet of Fire* is the best of the lot. Sure, fans of the books will probably be a bit disappointed that some of their favourite moments and sub-plots from the book haven't made it into the film (a common complaint since the first film), and some characters are so criminally under-used they may as well not have appeared, but *The Goblet of Fire* is pure entertainment from go to whoa.

Our eponymous hero Harry is now in his fourth year at Hogwart's School of Wizardry. After a terrible nightmare of the evil Lord Voldemort seemingly gaining strength and a disastrous visit to the Quidditch World Cup, the students at Hogwarts learn that their school is hosting the Tri-Wizards Cup, an international event pitting the champions of the three major schools of Wizardry against each other in a gruelling set of challenges. Harry is mysteriously entered into the competition as the fourth of three competitors, and he has to battle the pains of growing up, the deadly Tri-Wizard events, and the return of Voldemort's Death Eaters while unravelling the threads of the growing conspiracy surrounding his selection in the tournament.

And just what do Harry's dreams represent?

Harry and his friends, Hermione and Ron, are now 14, and the film does a wonderful job of portraying the confused emotions of newly pubescent teenagers. Daniel Radcliffe is growing into the role of Harry fairly well, but it is Emma Watson as Hermione Grainger and Rupert



Rob Long, Sonya Manzalini, Dianne Lenham, Su Morley, David Morley, Bobby Paquet and John Papanis

photo by Michael Osborne

Le Minibus

A few weeks ago Le Minibus launched their much-awaited CD.

Recipe: 1. Take a bunch of musos of suspicious origins 2. Make them listen to their grandparents vinyl collection 3. Add a trailer-load of instruments 4. Stir well 5. Do not add spices (too much already) 6. Put a good dance floor under audience' feet. What do you get? Tah Dah! (trumpet call) Le Minibus.



Grint as Ron Weasley that fare the best of the young actors. Series regulars Michael Gambon (Dumbledore), Robbie Coltrane (Hagrid) and Maggie Smith (Professor McGonagall) reprise their roles alongside Gary Oldman as Sirius Black (for all of two minutes of work), Jason Isaacs as the nasty Lucius Malfoy and Alan Rickman as the slimy Severus Snape.

One of the greatest aspects of the Harry Potter films is watching the Who's Who of great British actors parade across the screen - joining the cast this time around are Miranda Richardson as the annoying reporter Rita Skeeter and the excellent Ralph Fiennes as Voldemort. His interpretation of the series villain, seen here for the first time, is really quite scary. Capping off the fantastic supporting cast is Brendan Gleeson as the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, 'Mad-Eye' Moody. Gleeson steals every scene that he appears in with his roving mechanical eyeball and post-traumatic-stress disorder.

As is to be expected, though, the special effects are the true highlight. They bring J.K. Rowling's books to life, right down to the tiniest details. From the opening scenes of the Quidditch World Cup to the thrilling dragon chase each effect is more amazing than the last. Technology has really come a long way to blend so seamlessly.

Director Mike Newell, who may strike as an unusual choice of director given his background in emotionally driven comedies and dramas like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Donnie Brasco*, manages to provide a totally immersive universe on screen. His deft touches with the scenes involving Neville Longbottom (an excellent Matthew Lewis) really add a strong warmth and genuine affection for the characters. And despite the amazing special effects it is these non-action scenes of character bonding that linger longest in the memory.

*Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire* won't be everybody's pint of Butterbeer. Five percent of people would probably prefer to have everybody involved strung up for witchcraft, while another 15 percent will be wondering (again) what all the fuss is about. For the rest of us 80 percent *Goblet of Fire* is two and a half hours of sheer entertainment - it's

what going to the movies is all about. Laughter, tears, thrills and chills for people of all ages. If you haven't seen a Harry Potter movie before you might want to rent the first three from the video shop beforehand. Do it anyway, have a theme party and come dressed as your favourite character.

**Watt Space is a contemporary art space in the Newcastle CBD that exhibits the work of current students from the University of Newcastle**

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photo-montage by Benjamin Evison

### not waiting to happen...

Despite a sign which warns vaguely of the possible presence of pedestrians, there is nothing to **compel** motorists to allow pedestrians and cyclists safe passage at this major intersection



photo-montage by Benjamin Evison

## bike watch

highlighting concerns for those who choose to use our most efficient, cheap, healthy and community-friendly form of transport

writes Benjamin Evison

In the last issue I focused on the hazards of claiming your right to use the public roads. If cyclists try to avoid motor traffic by using the cycleways provided, there are also numerous obstacles to negotiate.

Finding out about cyclepaths is the first hurdle. The RTA provides pdf files of cyclepath maps on their website. The most useful map for locals is probably "NewcastleRegion Cycleways". I picked up my copy from Newcastle City Council's information desk.

After studying this map one can see there are a number of cycle path fragments spread around the region. What appears to be missing is the will to connect these fragments into a functioning network. But wait on, let's check the publication date: 1998! This date reflects the last time the State Government showed any real interest in promoting cycling - last century - and if the will was lacking then, what state is it in now? Not, I suspect, New South Wales...

Of course the RTA and local governments **have** been involved in creating and improving infrastructure since, they just don't appear particularly interested in keeping cyclists informed about it.

But back to the map: The precise details are obfuscated by the use of a green dotted line, with the dots so far apart (5mm) that details such as intersections are rendered meaningless.

Of interest to cyclists wanting to approach Hamilton and the Newcastle CBD from the southwest, is a route running



photo by Benjamin Evison

Your life in their hands...

from Charlestown Road through Kotara South, following the Styx Creek storm-water course through Rasberry Creek Reserve and Kotara back streets. Once you have ridden the length of Hillsborough Road and tackled the short but steep climb to cross Charlestown Road, it makes commuting from Warners Bay and Lake Macquarie a safer option than riding on the roads.

### Spot the Black Spot

This issue's danger spot is the intersection of Bridges/Turton Rds and Lambton Road.

When following the Kotara cycle route mentioned above, one has to cross this major intersection. The problem is that left-turning traffic on all four road approaches are given a dedicated left-turn lane. There is absolutely no provision for pedestrians or cyclists using the cycle route to cross these left turning lanes safely, and nothing adequate to warn motorists of the proximity of cyclists or pedestrians. The road users must give way to the traffic on the street they are entering (to their right), so as they approach they tend to be focusing on this direction, not on the curb and ramp off the footpath at their left.

I believe a reasonable measure for determining the suitability of a given route for branding as a "cycle route" is whether you would allow your child to use it unsupervised as a route to school.

With this intersection I would be concerned even accompanying a child. Approaching from the south, the only warning to cyclists and pedestrians of imminent danger is an old Stop sign that is so faded it has turned an even rust-brown. The bridge railing to the right obscures cyclists' vision of approaching traffic. The very least that is required are raised pedestrian crossings on each left-turn lane.

What astonished me when I stopped to photograph this intersection is that on two of the four pedestrian approaches there are no provisions to facilitate crossing at all! If a parent pushing a stroller wants to cross from the southwest corner (Bridges and Lambton Roads) there are no pedestrian lights, crossing markings, ramps over the traffic islands, pedestrian refuges - nothing. I am talking here about one of the two major intersections next to the biggest sporting stadium in the Hunter Region, frequented by thousands of Novacastrians every weekend. Presumably at least some of these people make their way from the surrounding suburbs on foot, don't they?

**If you are familiar with a particularly dangerous spot let us know so we can investigate!**

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# Innovative solutions for the future

An agreement signed at London's Heathrow Airport in October this year could have far-reaching implications for future transport systems in the Hunter Region, writes Len Regan

The agreement involves the first serious attempt to introduce new sustainable technology into moving people, this time in Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) systems. But firstly, what is PRT?

Personal Rapid Transit systems are designed to take people from one place to another along some form of guided way when they want to go, without any waiting, and without having to share the vehicle with other people.

So, basically, PRT systems have the potential to overcome many of the current problems that discourage people from using public transport.

We are all familiar with lifts or elevators in tall buildings. They are a form of PRT. You press a button to tell the lift you want to go for a ride. It (usually) arrives promptly. You get inside (but may have to share it with someone else), and press a button to tell the lift where you want to go to. You are driven to that destination automatically - there is no driver.

Try then to think of this technology on a horizontal plane, rather than a vertical one. You want to go from a shopping centre to the sports centre. At the shopping centre, you press a button at the 'station' to summon a vehicle. It turns up along a guided way and you climb on board. You can travel alone or with your family or friends - there are just 4 seats. There is plenty of room for your shopping, bicycle, electric scooter or wheelchair. You press the button for 'Sports Centre' and the PRT whisks you there without any stops along the way.

Futuristic? No. This is exactly what is being planned for the transport system to move people between the terminals at Heathrow Airport.

BAA (formerly British Airports Authority) have chosen the innovative ULTra Personal Rapid Transit system to provide better access between its terminals and car parks at Heathrow.

The ULTra system has been developed to provide a more effective and lower cost solution to the problems of urban transport. It uses automatically controlled vehicles, which can fit a maximum of four passengers, travelling on their own guideway network to provide an on-demand and non-stop service from any station to any other on the network.

ULTra offers a new form of public transport, one that waits for the passenger rather than the passenger waiting for it. ULTra offers considerable environmental benefits. It saves more than half of the fuel used by existing forms of public or private transport. The system is also exceptionally quiet. ULTra vehicles use electric battery power. They run along a concrete guideway that looks just like a cycleway but it has magnetic implants that guide the vehicle. Because the vehicles are driverless, the guideway has to be protected from intrusions. It can either be built in the air, or fenced if it is on the ground with simple bridges for pedestrian crossings.

**Opportunities for the Hunter Region:** On large sites such as regional shopping centres, John Hunter Hospital and the University of Newcastle, a PRT system would move people between the various facilities on the site, the parking areas and the transport interchanges.

But perhaps more interesting could be the opportunity for moving people around in new residential and industrial estates, such as Thornton North.



The ULTra system in operation in Europe

photo by ATS Ltd

The ULTra system would be built into the development infrastructure, just like the roads, water supply, power and communication systems. The network would be centred on Thornton Railway Station, and run past the local shops, schools and community centres, and branch out close to houses in the residential areas and the industrial estate.

Each morning, local residents would walk to their local PRT stop close to their home. They would summon the nearest vehicle which would take them non-stop to the shops, school, railway station or factory. The reverse would happen on the way home in the afternoon.

Travel on PRT would be available 24 hours a day. So no longer would there be a problem with poor bus services, missed connections and security (especially at night). The PRT system would be available whenever people wanted to travel.

This would lead to less dependence on car travel, less need for the second or third car in the household, less scarce capital tied up in depreciating cars, and more funds available to improve the quality of life for the family.

It almost sounds too good to be true, but it is actually happening at Heathrow. It really could happen in the Hunter.

Len Regan is a transport planning consultant who lives in Newcastle.

**Futuristic? No. This is exactly what is being planned for the transport system to move people between the terminals at Heathrow Airport.**

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## From 9/11 to Mayfield

Before her work ended abruptly on September 11, 2001, Janet Millington taught Australia's home grown permaculture system of food production to members of the Louisiana National Guard, on their 400 hectare property.

Now she's bringing the benefit of her expertise to local schools.

Ms Millington recently visited Newcastle to give a one day "Permaculture in Your Schools" workshop at Newcastle East Public School, organised by Permaculture Hunter Region's Food Security education project.

The project's manager, Tom Toogood, said that several schools in the Hunter had organic and permaculture gardens, and that the child obesity epidemic and environmental issues have given a new urgency to providing more child-appealing ways to combat poor nutrition and increase physical activity.

"Ms Millington showed how the whole primary curriculum could be strengthened and connected with practical environmental and social sustainability content and activities, whether in maths, music, English or science lessons," Mr Toogood said.

He said that the project aimed to prepare children to be more self-reliant over their food supply and nutrition, instead of depending on globalised markets and supermarket chains.

"Local organic food production in school, community and household gardens also avoids the enormous environmental costs of the food freight transport system", Mr Toogood said.

"Children could take home the fresh produce they had grown, and parents might consider extra pocket-money incentives or donating to school projects from the savings in their food budget. Hopefully they will also become inspired to start their own backyard food production", he said.



Tom Toogood demonstrating no-dig gardening

## Making Mayfield edible again

A new project at Webb Park aims to transform Mayfield by building on its historical reputation as the "edible suburb".

During the Great Depression and World War 2, many Mayfield residents depended on growing, sharing and swapping home grown produce and seeds.

A series of community workshops funded by Newcastle Council will promote the Maycare Plan, which aims to convert part of Webb Park in Hanbury Street into a permaculture, cultural and historical park attraction.

Fifty people recently attended three household-oriented workshops at the Maycare Community Centre in Webb Park, led by visiting permaculture expert, Janet Millington.

Maycare's Bronwyn Grieve said that regular clean-ups by Maycare volunteers had already stimulated more positive public use of Webb Park.

Anyone interested may contact Anthony Williamson on 4967 3269 or Tom Toogood on 4920 7763 or [permaculture@hunteradvocate.com.au](mailto:permaculture@hunteradvocate.com.au)

## kekulam meets needs of our future

Problems such as soil degradation, water shortages, chemical-resistant pests and blight, and excessive consumption of pesticides, fertilisers and fossil fuels could be solved by observing and working with nature,

writes Anthony Williamson

The dreadful reality is that our current methods of agriculture are unsustainable and traditional farming practices unable to support our Western civilisation.

Adopting permacultural principles provides a way to avoid the looming food crisis.

While current agriculture is fossil fuel intensive and traditional methods labour intensive, *Permaculture is design intensive*, according to the co-ordinator of Permaculture, David Holmgren.

Permaculturalists seek to empower our communities, reduce waste and consumerism and facilitate mainstream adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

A wonderful example of sustainable agriculture is the Kekulam method of rice growing, according to ILEIA, the Centre for Information on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture, an independent organization from the Netherlands with a mandate to alleviate poverty through the promotion of agro-ecological approaches.

Visit their great website at [www.leisa.info](http://www.leisa.info).

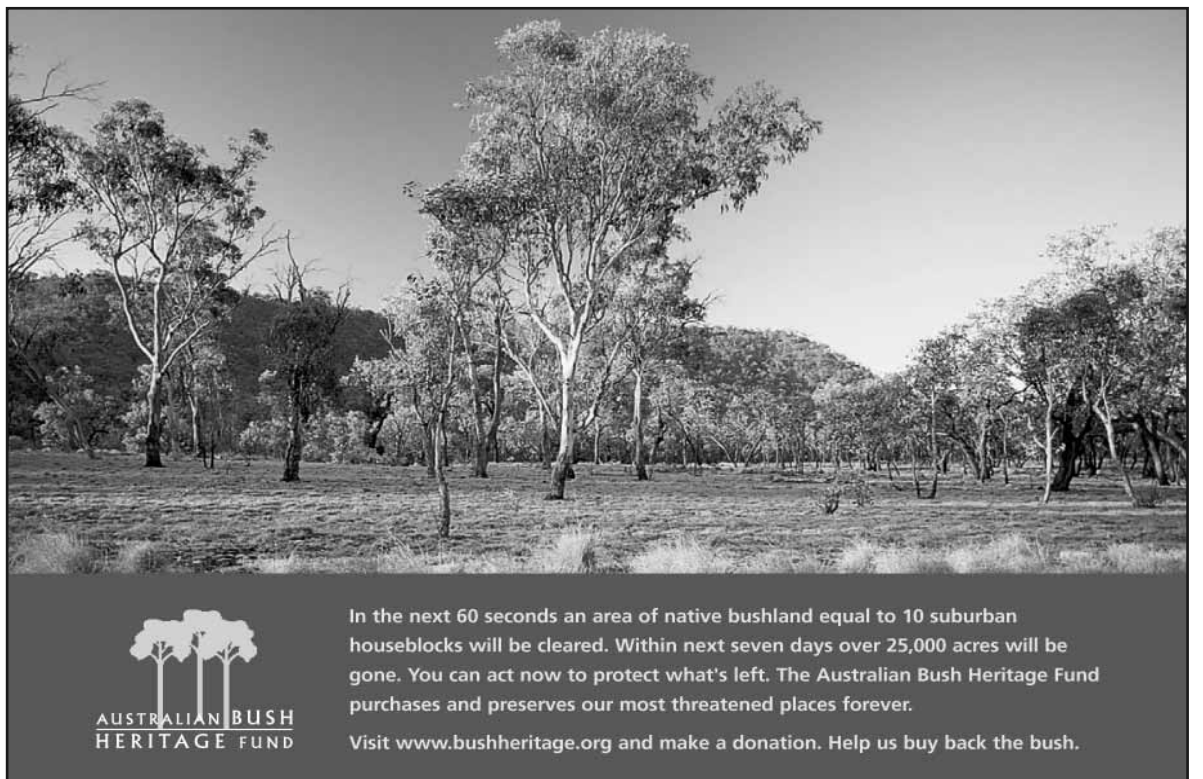
'Kekulam' means the sowing of paddy seed that has not been pre-germinated. This new approach combines farmers' experiences with modern farming concepts such as mulching wetland rice, using weeds as crop protection agents, and carefully avoiding normal weed control measures and agro-chemicals.

The Kekulam system uses mulch to reduce erosion to near zero, improves soil properties and reduces both the incidence of weeds and the amount of tillage required.

Sri Lankan farmers found the system was 75% cheaper, more time efficient than conventional rice cultivation and achieved water savings of up to 50%. This helped to offset the negative effects of climatic irregularities. In ecological terms the system leads to a substantial improvement in fauna and flora biodiversity.

In the earliest stages of cultivation, rice grown by the new Kekulam method requires no pest or disease management measures. Initial yields may be 10% less than conventionally cultivated rice, but they subsequently rise to a similar level.

Anthony Williamson is the Co-Chair of Permaculture Hunter Region.



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Rigpa, meaning "the innermost nature of the mind" is the name Sogyal Rinpoche (author of the ground-breaking book "THE TIBETAN BOOK OF LIVING AND DYING"), has given to his work through an international network of centres and retreats in 11 countries around the world.

Rigpa offers a graduated study and practice program through which people living in the West can come to understand and embody the truth of Tibetan Buddhism. Regular introductory courses are offered with the opportunity for ongoing study and practice. A small library of books and tapes are available.

Beginners are welcome to attend

**Friday night meditation sessions, 6-7pm,**

check our website for details and for upcoming courses. [www.rigpanewcastle.org.au](http://www.rigpanewcastle.org.au) or email [inquiries@rigpanewcastle.org.au](mailto:inquiries@rigpanewcastle.org.au) Ph. 49252770 We are located at: 1st Floor, 123 King St Newcastle (opposite DJ's Car Park)



## Carers' Night: Celebration of Support

By Michele Oshan

Have you ever felt inadequate in your job, confused, helpless and out of control? What if your job has no wage, no set hours, limited resources and little support? What if your sole motivation for doing such a job was for the well-being of your loved one?

This is how many parents and friends of people with mental health issues describe their situations to Natalie Joy, the Hunter Carer Advocate for the Schizophrenia Fellowship Carers Assist Service.

The Schizophrenia Fellowship has been operating in the Hunter for the past six years to develop services that meet the needs of people with mental health problems, their family and friends. The organisation strives to promote a community in which people experiencing mental health problems are valued and treated as equals.

As part of her role, Natalie provides one-to-one emotional and practical support, information and knowledge on how to navigate your way around the mental health services. There is also an educational component to her role, running "Well Ways", which Natalie describes as "a travellers' guide to well-being" for families of people with mental health problems, and other educational programs that provide coping strategies.

The Carers Assist Service, with funding from Newcastle City Council, was able to publicly value and celebrate the efforts of these parents, children and extended family members, with a dinner and evening of entertainment at the Panthers Club in Newcastle during Carers Week.

Good food and enthusiastic engaging guest speakers - Craig Hamilton, well-known on the advocacy circuit, and Matthew Heath, a 12-year-old who cares for his parent - provided an opportunity for 130 people to socialise together, listen to one another's stories, and encourage their important, and often unrecognised, work.

With one in every five of us being effected at some time in our lives by emotional and mental health issues, we rely on the understanding support of our families and loved ones to help us through. In light of the recent inquiry into mental health care, such ongoing support from our community is understood as imperative to the journey to recovery for many of us. Innovative training programs and mental health support groups are available in Newcastle, Cessnock, Maitland, Nelson Bay, Raymond Terrace, Maitland and Lake Macquarie.

Nadine Farrell, the Hunter Community Development Officer, co-ordinates these services, which include the Mental Health First Aid course, the Remind Training package, and information sessions for community groups on a variety of issues in mental health.

In 2006, secondary aged students will have the opportunity to commence the Fellowship's Education Program which has been offered to every high school in the Hunter Region.

For any further information about Carer Assist, please phone Natalie 4960 2125 or 0422 404 878.

For information on Mental Health education or support groups, please call Nadine on 4960 3225 or 0423 767 468.



photo by Michele Oshan

Craig Hamilton and Mathew Heath, guest speakers at the Carers function.



photo by Michele Oshan

At the inaugural (re)framing health symposium (from left): Ruth and Howard Johnson, Therese Schmid Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences, University of Newcastle Chancellor Professor Trevor Waring & Professor Beverley Raphael.

## Community Health through Creativity

By Michele Oshan

Creativity enables us to express ourselves, participate in our environment, celebrate with our communities, and enliven our spirits - all of which lends itself to restoring our health. When art met health at the inaugural (re)framing health symposium, held at Noahs on the Beach, a community connected.

Such was the emphasis of this one-day gathering, which provided a valuable opportunity for people from all disciplines and interests to contribute to discussions on the links between art, health, humanities, community and environment.

The symposium profiled some of Newcastle's successful projects, honouring the creativity of the people forging community ventures that result in positive health outcomes for individuals, communities and environment.

Pippa Robinson, the founding director of Watt Space Gallery said "art has an important role in creating change and developing healing environments". Her extensive involvement in developing and implementing the 'Arts for Health' program at the John Hunter Hospital resulted in many murals, art exhibitions and drama performances which continue to bolster the morale of patients and staff alike.

Marilyn Cintra, an internationally known artist and cultural activist with extensive experience in community cultural development reported on the 14 hospitals in the ACT and NSW that conducted cultural and arts plans as part of their redevelopment or building design.

All of these plans included the belief that nature represents the best positive distraction in health care environments. While it is heartening to hear of the existence of health care design acknowledging the therapeutic worthiness of nature, the innate human need to connect with nature requires a deeper embrace.

This symposium coincided with the visit to Australia of Dr Jane MacNaughton, head of the Centre for Medical Humanities at Durham University (UK), who led a discussion about her experiences and research into community-based arts in health, and spoke of her interest in offering medical students the opportunity to take arts subjects as part of their medical degrees. Her partner Andrew Russell, a senior lecturer at Durham University, spoke of the Lantern events in the north of England initiated by community artists, who spent two weeks working with primary and secondary students constructing lanterns and organising a final procession through the streets.

Similarly, initiatives have achieved success within the Hunter region, for example, with community arts and cultural events such as the Winter Heat fire spectacle as part of the Live Sites program, and the innovative development of the medical curriculum at Newcastle University.

Associate Professor Jill Gordon was involved in the development of the medical curriculum at Newcastle from 1977 to 1985. Her current work as head of the Centre for Medical Humanities at the University of Sydney, and as founding president of the Association for Medical Humanities (NZ), continues to emphasise the personal and professional development of medical students that is required so as to foster a broader understanding of health: An understanding that recognises and involves a persons' creative restorative abilities, their philosophies and beliefs, to ensure better holistic health outcomes for people who seek health care and for people who provide it.

Therese Schmid, editor and co-author of *Promoting Health Through Creativity*, along with other professionals at this gathering, lent their enthusiastic support for the development of a research centre for arts, health and humanities. After witnessing the gathering of inspired, artistic and inventive spirits at this symposium, it would seem that Newcastle is indeed ready, willing and able for such creative collaboration.

As Werner Erhard would suggest, we can choose to make the health of ourselves, our community and our environment **our** personal business: If not us, then who? If not here, then where? If not now, then when?

Michele Oshan is a holistic mental health counsellor who runs dance movement classes. For more information call 0400 388 965

**art has an important role in creating change and developing healing environments**

**Newcastle is ready, willing and able for such creative collaboration**

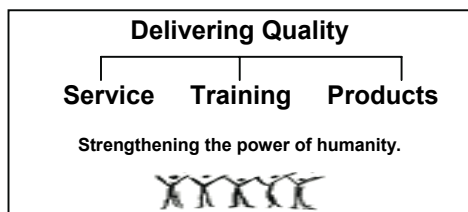


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## Organic goodness

Guests of the Hunter Advocate's first edition launch in September were treated to organic wine provided by Rosnay and Tamburlaine vineyards by donation. Greer Allen talked to Oliver Statham from Rosnay and Owen Gwilliam from Biological Farmers of Australia to find out what the benefits of organic wine are for consumers and the environment.



photo by Greer Allen

Organic wine is distinct from conventional wine primarily because it is free from pesticides and synthetic chemicals. Natural processes are enhanced through farming methods and this means inputs are minimised.

'Making wine organically means that allergic reactions are minimised and a more natural flavor is present in the wine' explained Oliver Statham from Rosnay. While sulfur is present in organic wine, it is only a by-product of the natural process of fermentation.

The vineyard prides itself on its 'terrior,' or 'regional flavor.' Rosnay's wine is not blended from other sources and therefore captures the distinct flavors from its region in Canowindra New South Wales.

Organic farming processes recognise holistic means of growing and handling produce. 'Organics recognise that the whole system is linked – soil, plants, animals, food, people and environment' explained

Owen Gwilliam from Biological Farmers of Australia. The state of the environment can therefore be enhanced by organics.

Family-run winery Rosnay converted a cattle stud at Canowindra to organic production after the family's eldest son Sam completed studies in permaculture. The first organic crop was planted in 1997 and the property at Canowindra has continued to expand ever since. Rosnay also now grows gourmet organic olives and olive oil.

Both Rosnay and Tamburlaine wines can be found at bottle shops around the Hunter. For more information on Rosnay visit [www.rosnaywines.com.au](http://www.rosnaywines.com.au) or call Rosnay on (02) 63443215. To check out Tamburlaine go to [www.tamburlaine.com.au](http://www.tamburlaine.com.au).

Thanks to Rosnay and Tamburlaine for providing such fabulous wines!

## Sustainable Arts & Music Festival

Glenworth Valley hosted the second annual Peats Ridge Festival in early December, celebrating arts, music and environmental sustainability with over 150 acts and more than 60 workshops and talks, writes Greer Allen.

The Peats Ridge festival is a standout festival with a vision of nurturing creativity and community within a sustainable environment. The organisers teamed up with the University of NSW who conducted environmental audits over the weekend as they did at the inaugural festival last year.

Collections of recycling bins were found all over the festival grounds, all food sold on site was provided with biodegradable plates and cutlery, whilst volunteers organised the on-site composting system; all actions which lessen the ecological footprint of such festivities. Most impressively, all electricity for the festival was generated from biodiesel using recycled oil from fish and chip shops along the Central Coast, Newcastle and Sydney.

Festival goers enjoyed the sounds of performers from around Australia and New Zealand with significant representation of local talent such as Red Deer White Wolf, the Hauntingly Beautiful Mousemoon, iOTA, Afro Moses, Stiff Gins, Waiting for Guinness, Darth Vegas and more.

Newcastle's newly formed circus 'The Lovelorn Living Party' made their debut appearance and dazzled the crowd with their roaming stage, performing acts of bohemia and fantasy.



Photos from the Peats Ridge Festival including workshops, live music, art, recycling and unusual structures



photos by Michael Osborne & Greer Allen

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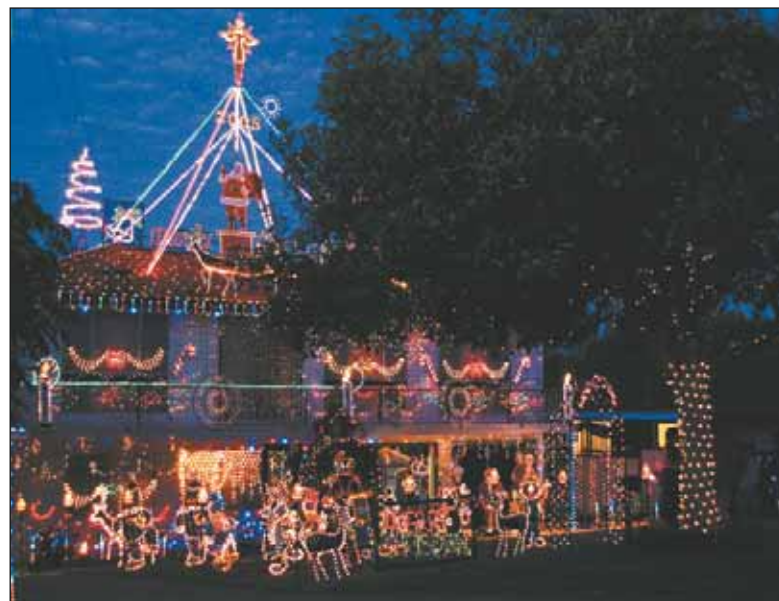
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(and an electricity bill that won't fit in a regular sized stocking)  
We spotted this Blackalls Park Nativity from two blocks away. The psychotropic light show (including life-sized singing Santa robot) may induce epileptic seizure and could even be visible from space.

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**Mr Bryce Gaudry**  
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newcastle@parliament.nsw.gov.au  
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**Mr John Bartlett**  
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f (02) 4967 4556

**The Hon. Milton Orkopoulos**  
MP for Swansea  
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs; and  
Minister Assisting the Premier on  
Citizenship  
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Swansea NSW 2281  
aorkopol@parliament.nsw.gov.au  
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f (02) 4972 1494

our **local** representatives

**Cessnock City Council**  
PO Box 152, Cessnock 2325  
t (02) 4993 4100 f (02) 4993 2500  
council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au  
http://www.cessnock.nsw.gov.au  
Meetings: 1st & 3rd Wed 6:30pm  
General Manager: Mr Colin Cowan

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**Lake Macquarie City Council**  
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council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au  
http://www.lakemac.com.au  
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Acting GM: Mr Tony Farrell

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mcc@maitland.nsw.gov.au  
http://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au  
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General Manager: Mr David Evans

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**Newcastle City Council**  
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General Manager: Ms Janet Dore

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council@portstephens.nsw.gov.au  
http://www.portstephens.nsw.gov.au  
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Monday - Friday: 10am - 5pm  
Saturday: 10am - 2pm (in summer)

The Wilderness Society is a community based environmental advocacy organisation which campaigns to protect, promote and restore wilderness and natural processes across Australia. Our shop is staffed by volunteers so all profits can go to help support these campaigns.

**Dear Dorothy Dix**

Mr Matthew Morris, ALP. State member for Charlestown. NSW Legislative Assembly. September 22, 2005. *My question without notice is to the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Small Business. What is the government doing to support families and small business in coping with higher petrol prices?*

Mr. David Campbell. Minister for all of the above. *The NSW Government is committed to investigating and using environmentally friendly alternative fuels, including ethanol... Our next contract [for the purchase of around 110 million litres of fuel for government cars] includes ethanol blended fuel and other alternative fuels.*

Mr. Campbell also wants the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and Trades Practices Act, to have more bite. *One of the best cures for high prices is the pressure that comes from competition.* Which of course is much in evidence every Friday arvo, when fuel prices at almost every petrol bowser, regardless of company brand, simultaneously rise. Mr Campbell has written to John Howard about his concerns.

Straightdope writes : *The immediate beneficiaries of ethanol subsidies have been the corn farmers and, more significantly, the Archer Daniels Midland Corporation... better known as ADM. The world's largest grain producer, ADM produces 40 percent of the ethanol used to make gasohol.*

As might be supposed, the company and its officers have been eloquent in their defense of ethanol and generous in contributing to both political parties. The politicians have been generous right back. The libertarian Cato Institute estimates that every dollar of ADM's ethanol profit costs taxpayers 30 bucks.

As for energy efficiency, he wryly observes: *Given that ethanol production involves the conversion of massive amounts of energy from one form to another, the contention that the process is an efficient way to make fuel seems to fly in the face of basic physics.*

*Money wasting government schemes are hardly rare. But how many do you know of that flout the second law of thermodynamics?*

**Alan's not missing a thing**

*I must be missing something with ethanol.* So began Alan Kohler from the ABC's Inside Business on October 2nd.

In Australia, most ethanol is made from wheat. Our Liberal Party Prime Minister, John Howard wants Australia's oil companies to commit to producing 350 million litres of ethanol by 2010.

As Alan explained: *This is a plan to run our cars on food when half the world is starving. Ethanol costs more to make than petrol, so it needs subsidies from the*



photo by Dave Ryan

Early evening Kooragang Island from Stockton

**Some straight talk from straightdope**

Following the 1973 Arab oil embargo, the US. Government, in 1978, introduced subsidies to Corn belt states to produce ethanol. Ever since, a huge bunfight has been waged between the industry and its critics over the true energy value and costs to taxpayers of ethanol. It has become very technical. Of the million entries on the web, you might try <http://www.straightdope.com/columns/031128.html>.

*Government estimated at \$118 million a year...*

*The report of the government task force on biofuels is equivocal to say the least... Not mentioned in the report is the name Dick Horan, the main beneficiary of this policy. His company, Manildra, produces all the ethanol in Nowra and will make millions from increasing output to 350 megalitres a year. He also seems to be a prime ministerial friend and big donor to the Liberal Party.*

*Maybe that's what I'm missing.*

**So generous**

Our Prime Minister's Liberal government announced in late 2005 it would abandon the 2006 petrol excise increase. How Wonderful you are thinking. Because as a recent NRMA survey revealed, rising fuel prices resulted in one quarter of members cutting their spending on food and groceries and one third, on items such as books and CDs. Well, according to the NRMA, Canberra is forgoing 0.06 cents on every litre Assuming weekly consumption of 60 litres, motorists will save 3.6 cents, which is just under \$2.00 a year.

**What relief!**

Not to worry. The cavalry has arrived. In the form of 4 cents per litre petrol discounting, offered by major super market chains. Assuming you spend \$150 each week, at Coles or Woollies and buy 60 litres of petrol, their offer translates into \$3.60. With such savings, each Sunday you can put that block of Cadbury's on the table for dessert after the roast, while planning to add that favourite CD to your collection by 2012.

**A lot of chocolate blocks and CDs**

*Almost every government has created, almost without realizing*

*it, an encrusted apparatus of subsidies which, once established, proves almost irremovable. Worse, many of these subsidies are harmful to our economies as well as our environments.*

*In different ways such perverse subsidies bedevil all our economies. The public interest, which was their justification, has been lost... It is hard to calculate the value of such subsidies (broadly meaning tax breaks and favourable government treatment to all industries) world wide, but they probably amount to at least US\$2 trillion a year.*

That was from *The no-win madness of catch-22 subsidies*, published in the Financial Times, July 2003 and co-written by Crispin Tickell and Oxford academic Norman Myers

**Let's repeat that.** Fossil fuel dependant global industry runs on \$US2,000,000,000,000,000 in tax subsidies every year.

**Fuel for thought**

*(We) have examined the public subsidies to fossil fuels in Australia. We estimate that they amount to over \$6.5 billion per year. (or \$A6,500,000,000,000 every year.)*

That was Mark Diesendorf and Christopher Reidy in *Subsidies to Fossil Fuels are Undermining a Sustainable Future*, also published in abbreviated form in *The Canberra Times* in November 2001.

Omitted from their calculations was the \$2 billion a year diesel fuel rebate scheme. And the discounted Queensland government price (dropped by about \$A0.5 billion) on the sale of the Gladstone Power Station to a private corporation.

Two years later (in *Subsidies that Encourage Fossil Fuel Usage in Australia*, Jan. 2003) Reidy put the total fuel subsidies at around \$9 billion. (or \$A9,000,000,000,000)

Our co-authors conclude: *With the billions of dollars that could be obtained annually from the*

*removal of fossil fuel subsidies and from improvements in energy efficiency, there are more than enough resources available to both the government and the private sectors to build a substantial renewable energy industry and greatly improved urban public transport systems.*

**Imagine**

Imagine a combined approach by all spheres of government and the building industry, which resulted in every new house, high rise office and residential tower constructed in the Lower Hunter, producing solar energy and wind power, with the excess power fed into the local grid which ran an extensive light rail system throughout Newcastle and the Lower Hunter.

Unused rail lines once used to cart coal would be re-utilised. In inner Newcastle new tracks laid between the free, all day car parking provided at Bar Beach and Tighes Hill TAFE would take commuters via Parkway Avenue and Maitland Road into the city loop, around Wharf Street servicing Honeysuckle and along Hunter Street to the transport hub at Civic.

The carrot would be the whole range of existing grants to first home buyers, depreciation allowances on commercial buildings and other tax incentives conditional upon joining the local scheme. A miniscule portion of the \$9 billion in subsidies going to fossil fuel each year, would be redirected to produce say 10 kilometres of light rail track, in inner Newcastle.

**Nah. Only kidding. Doesn't stack up. Not enough tax subsidies.**



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