



THE NIMBIN GROUNDS

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Grow your own... house

Calls for the construction of Lismore's first hemp house have intensified following a wall-building demonstration at Nimbin's Hemp Embassy.

Klara Marosszeky, an industrial hemp researcher, said a number of eco-village developers had expressed an interest in constructing hemp buildings, but at present Klara can't source the hemp.

"We're using really old, mouldy hemp for this demonstration, the dross of a 2005 mop crop," she said. "It will still work."

A chemical reaction takes place between the hemp and lime that enables the material to set like cement naturally but with more flexibility and less weight. The material breathes and provides an ideal mould-free environment with a modern look. Added to that it's a renewable resource, or it could be.

NSW is currently the only State where hemp cannot be grown as a commercial crop, and Klara has now made a contract for supply from Western Australia.

"That's not sustainable long-term," she said. "You could grow enough hemp for a house on one hectare in four months."

The application to the

development of a low-cost housing strategy was not lost on the large media contingent that converged on the Hemp Embassy.

'Junior' kept to his task at the flat-tyred cement mixer on the footpath outside, ignoring the media scrum. "You make a very dry mix," he said, raising the mask he was wearing to protect against the lime dust.

The similarity to concrete construction ended there. Hemp has enough structural strength that the wall Junior was building needed no reinforcement. As Junior shovelled the pale mixture from a wheelbarrow into the formwork in the Embassy's window, Klara explained how the pulp inside the hemp stem, the hurd, bonds with lime when wet to produce a mineral substance.

"Mixing lime-based mortars with hemp is an ancient technology that is currently being used in commercial applications all over the world - except in Australia. The French have been building with this technique for the past forty years, because hemp has always been grown there," she said.

"The UK government recently supported the construction of the Adnam's



Brewery Buildings using 90,000 hemp blocks in a \$30 million dollar project in Suffolk, England."

Klara has been working with UNSW since 2003 to develop a series of mixes for lime-based mortars and hemp masonry for a variety of applications in the construction industry.

Her research has taken her all over the world. "There are hemp buildings in Ireland, the UK, Scandinavia, Spain and North America," she said.

"We could have a low-cost, low carbon-footprint housing industry start tomorrow, but so far there has been little interest from the government in lifting the ban on the commercial cultivation of hemp."

Klara will be conducting workshops at the Nimbin MardiGrass in May.



Well built Industrial hemp researcher Klara Marosszeky (top), Junior and the mix (above), a hemp dome construction (left).



Park eradication program



While the Police Media Unit has been trumpeting the successes of its multi-million dollar Cannabis Eradication Program, it has remained silent about repairing the damage to local parks caused by their operations.

Coronation Park at The Channon sustained significant damage to its oval and areas adjoining the perimeter roadway, resulting from the week-long operation in pouring rain.

David Hallett, whose house overlooks the park said, "I counted five 4WDs, a large pan-tech, an ambulance, and the helicopter, plus a communications centre in the park. It was all pretty intimidating, day after day."

Dunoon-The Channon Pony Club member Moira Kenny said the damage to turf surfaces was so bad that the club had to cancel its weekend meet.

"It was pretty disgusting, like vandals had been doing wheelies," she said.

"We take care of the park, we take part in regular working bees on the grounds, and then they come and just leave it like this."

Robyn Kelly, market manager of The Channon Craft Market Inc feared that repairs would not be completed in time for the March markets.

"We've had to cancel twice in recent months due to rain. We've got 18 staff and 250 stallholders," she said.

"They've shown no respect for the community, or for stallholders, or for the many groups that hire the field."

Coronation Park is maintained under Lismore Council's Parks and Gardens budget. Council staff confirmed that the Police neither paid for the use of the park nor have any responsibility to contribute to the cost of repairs.

This year's Cannabis Eradication program confiscated 1500 plants from the Rainbow Region.

Operations Choppers over Tuntable (top), and some of the resulting damage to Coronation Park (below).



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