



THE NIMBIN GOOD TIMES

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Davidson's
Plum
Edition
October
2010

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Rally's departure a big win for region

by Andrea Vickers, No Rally Group

No Rally Group members, and our many supporters, are breathing a collective sigh of relief today with the end of a 'David and Goliath' struggle.

The news that the World Rally Championship will not return to Tweed and Kyogle is a victory for common sense, residents' rights, our local economy, and the safety of people and wildlife.

It's a win for our ecotourism industry, which should be nurtured as the natural tourism drawcard for the region. It's a win for safe driving on our dangerous roads. It's a win for our national parks which need to be protected for all non-human species. And it's a win for the community, who can now start to work together to decide which events truly reflect the character and future of our region.

It's not often a community group sees success in a fight to protect ourselves and our environment against poor governance and the depredations of big business. It can only be put down to the passion of the many locals who love the Tweed and want to see it develop in a sensible, safe and sustainable direction.

If it's true that this is the only place ever to have the WRC pull out because of the concerns of locals, it's also a win for grassroots over global interests. The WRC is a marketing event, and the real beneficiaries are car companies and media corporations who make many millions from the broadcast rights.



Sustained opposition. A section of the large array of banners that greeted the WRC convoy as it travelled through Uki in September last year.

The rally's touted economic benefit to the local area is so dubious that it led Tweed Shire Council to recommend an independent full cost-benefit analysis of any future rally. TSC last week voted by a narrow 4-3 margin to continue supporting the event, and resolved that a comprehensive, peer reviewed economic analysis should be undertaken by the Southern Cross University.

This is a vote of no confidence in the review, which was criticised from the start because of its limited scope, secretive procedures and the fact it was conducted by the unqualified CEO of a marketing company.

We call on rally organisers to acknowledge the people opposed to the rally are not a radical minority, but a diverse group of community members concerned with protecting our democratic rights and our environmental heritage.

Contrary to the claims of rally proponents, residents opposing it are ordinary, working, contributing people from many walks of life, with legitimate concerns and a passion for the future of this region. Three thousand signatures against the rally were gathered in a few weeks last year, and polls have consistently showed residents don't want the rally.

We thank everyone in the community who has supported us morally, financially, and with the thousands of letters you have written to government departments, rally organisers and media.

Rally Australia has consistently fuelled community divisions by making misleading and conflicting statements about their activities, and by ignoring the concerns of residents about transparency, the environment and proof of economic benefit.

We hope the organisers will learn from their mistakes here and conduct proper community consultation in Coffs Harbour. We also hope they stay out of that region's national parks, which deserve just as much protection as those in this region.

Wherever the rally goes in NSW, it will bring with it the specially enacted Motor Sports Act, which overturns 12 hard earned laws. This will cause great concern to residents who care about rights and due process, no matter where the rally goes. We continue to call for this legislation to be repealed.

This outcome supports our view that in 2010 it is just not appropriate to change the law for the sake of political prestige and big business profits, or to use national parks, World Heritage Areas and residential roads as a staging ground for rally racing.

Renewed calls for ban on lethal taser weapons

Civil liberties groups around Australia have again brought the use by Police of taser stun guns into question, following the recent death of a man in Sydney after being tasered.

NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione told a press conference that the officers' actions were appropriate to deal with the disturbed man, who was armed with two knives.

Qld Council of Civil Liberties lawyer Terry O'Gorman said police had a "cavalier attitude" to the use of the weapons.

"There is increasing evidence of police using and misusing tasers in everyday situation," he told the ABC.

The death in Sydney occurred a day after the release of surveillance video by the WA Corruption and Crime Commission, showing an Aboriginal man in custody being tasered 13 times in the presence of nine police.

"This is Australia's equivalent of the Rodney King video," said Terry O'Gorman, referring to the infamous US case of excessive force by police on an Afro-American, in what was widely seen as a racist attack.

Increasingly, Australian police ranks are being swelled by junior officers, who may not have the training and judgement to handle the difficult situations they encounter, and there appears to be a corresponding surge in successful applications for stress leave.

Tasers have been introduced into all Australian States to provide an alternative to the use of lethal force, despite recorded deaths from their use overseas, now numbering in the hundreds.

Julian Brady, of UNSW said, "Tasers should be regarded as lethal weapons," pointing out that people were not asked if they had a heart condition, or asthma, before the weapon was used.

Terry O'Gorman said, "We need uniform regulations (across State boundaries) to stop this misuse of tasers."



Nimbin Environment Centre in January this year.

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