



From the mayor's desk
by Steve Krieg
Lismore City Council

Deputy Mayor Jeri Hall and I had the privilege of attending the Nimbin Aquarius Festival Elders dinner, as part of the 50th anniversary of the original festival in 1973.

Aquarius Festival Elders dinner

Later that night we found ourselves at the Bush Theatre and caught up with David, one of the organisers of the event. It was a fantastic night meeting some wonderful people. Thank you so much for your hospitality.

Works to repair two landslip sites on Nimbin Road is underway. These works involve tree felling at both sites. Motorists are advised to follow VMS boards and signage, with delays expected as the works proceed.

The works are expected to take about nine months to complete, subject to weather, and the availability of

contractors and materials. The works involve piling and construction of a retaining wall, reconstruction of pavement, reinstatement of road and guardrail barriers along with installing signs, guideposts and line marking. Traffic control lights and the existing single-lane traffic control will remain in place during the works.

Following the 2022 natural disaster Terania Creek Road also suffered extensive damage. Due to the nature and large number of damaged sites, plans are being finalised on how to best provide timely improvements for the

community and motorists. Council has received funding from the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement to replace the current structure at Branch Creek Crossing. An alternative structure is necessary to improve the resilience of the network. Works will include replacing the current box culvert structure with a 16m bridge and extending erosion protection to the edge of the road.

Additional works required and subsequent funding for other damages on Terania Creek Road are currently being assessed. Survey and design work is commencing

in June 2023.

Lastly, Council's draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan (including the budget), as well as proposed fees and charges, for next financial year are now on Public Exhibition to get community feedback.

The Program and Plan sets out the projects, services and activities Council will provide to the community, how much they will cost and when they will be delivered.

The draft budget proposes a slight cash surplus of \$205,000.

Councillors are very aware that our community is doing it tough with rising costs of living as we continue to recover from the worst natural disaster in Australia's recorded history.

That is why they have purposefully kept any rises in rates, fees or charges below the rate of inflation of 7.8 per cent.

After no increases in rates and fees last year, residential and business rates are proposed to rise in line with the State Government's rate peg of 3.7 per cent, with fees rising by 5 per cent.

And importantly, Council now also have a viable four-year plan and a Long-Term Financial Plan. This means if we are disciplined and stick to these plans, we will finally become financially sustainable.

To have your say, go to the Your Say tab on Council's website at: www.lismore.nsw.gov.au Submissions close on 15th June.



by Kevin Hogan,
Federal Member for Page

Nimbin is an exceptionally important tourism icon in our region and I believe an on-going investment in its tourism assets is essential.

The Nimbin's Rainbow Road walking track is a welcome community-led project that aims to construct a concrete and boardwalk track over one km long for the active community of Nimbin and importantly, its visiting tourists.

It also provides a preferred route for pedestrians from Alternative Way to and from the CBD. I am delighted I was able to make this track happen with federal government support.

This project will include concrete pathways, lighting, interpretive signage, way-finding signage, artwork, small bridges over the

nearby creek system, park furniture and native plantings.

I am pleased to see that the community has been heavily involved in the design of the project and the end results bring together a good mix of traditional and contemporary themes and ideas. Local artists have been invited to participate in the commissioning of artworks for the project.

Construction is due to commence over the coming weeks and is expected to be completed in September/October this year.

The total budget of \$2.5 million is fully funded under a Bushfire Local Economic Recovery grant I obtained two years ago. Lismore City Council is responsible for delivering the project.

I can't wait to see the finished result.

Respect for First Nations peoples

At the May meeting of Ballina Council, we voted to move the Australia Day ceremony and awards presentation to the 25th January.

The vote was 5-3 with two Councillors absent. This is a big step for our Council and community, and comes just before National Reconciliation week.

Early in the meeting, I moved a motion to move the awards ceremony to the Local Government Week which is held in July every year. I thought that was a much more appropriate time to hold the awards. My preference would be to have a new national day of celebration that is not linked to the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove and the raising of British flag.

Clearly this needs to be initiated by the Federal Government. It's my understanding that Australia is the only Commonwealth country that holds its national day of 'celebration' on the day that the colonising forces/ships arrived and falsely declared terra nullius, which is a legal term meaning that the land is unoccupied or uninhabited. Clearly that wasn't the case.

It's unfortunate that a Councillor has already vowed



by Cr Jeff Johnson
Ballina Council

to bring the matter back to the next Council meeting as a rescission motion. I really hope that a rescission motion isn't lodged and those Councillors not supportive of the change don't seek to use this decision as a chance to sow the seeds of division in our community.

While many in the Ballina Shire still think that January 26th is the most appropriate day to 'celebrate', probably an equal number feel that it's not appropriate. I'm sure a majority though, given the history of the day and our large Indigenous population, would recognise that it's not a date that our whole community can embrace. I haven't been to our Australia Day ceremony for a number of years, and now see it as a day of reflection rather than a day to celebrate.

This year it's particularly sensitive given the proposed constitutional amendment to recognise the First Nations as the original occupants of this great land, and to enshrine a Voice to Parliament into the constitution.

For those reading who have concerns about The Voice, or feel that we should be striving for a more ambitious change, please consider the alternative that a failed referendum would result in. It won't move our country forward or help to unite us, it will do the opposite.

On the contrary, a resounding Yes vote will be a powerful statement of unity and will be a huge benefit to our country as a whole, irrespective of one's race, religion or ancestry. Change only occurs when we speak up and call out the negatives like racism, sexism, bullying etc. This referendum provides us all with a change to vote yes for a better future for our country and in particular our First Nations brothers and sisters.

With the recent reporting of the racial abuse directed at ABC journalist Stan Grant and other media and sporting personalities, I'm concerned that the proposed Voice referendum to be held later this year will result in increased division in our community.

It feels a bit like the Marriage Equality vote from a few years ago. From my perspective it feels like prejudice and fear are the key emotions that fuel much of the negative sentiment on both these matters.

In an ideal world, the major political parties would unite on these issues and work together towards a more celebrated and inclusive society rather than stoke the flames of division to rally their conservative base.

To highlight the perceived political opportunism, we have witnessed the Federal Liberal Leader, Peter Dutton recently come out in total opposition to the Voice referendum, claiming that it would "re-racialise our nation" at a time when "we need to unite the country".

This is the same guy that only a few months ago was saying that he supported constitutional recognition but only in the form of local and regional voices. Not sure what happened to that, other than probably a perceived personal political advantage if The Voice fails. That approach certainly won't unify our country.

That is what I loathe about politics. So often it becomes more about the conflict and perceptions of advantage than it does about the policy or what's best for our community or country.

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THE GREENS

NSW has a police problem

by Sue Higginson, NSW Greens

It is an absolute tragedy that it takes the death of a 95-year old grandmother who was in a care home to alert the media and politicians to the extreme dysfunction within the NSW Police.

The use of a taser against Cooma grandmother Claire Nowland that has now resulted in her death is a reminder that no-one is safe or immune from excessive use of force by police officers against residents of NSW.

In the 2020-21 financial year, the NSW Police were forced to pay out \$33 million in compensation to 398 victims of police violence, this is 100 more victims than the year before, and only represents a fraction of the actual incidents of police violence and misconduct.

These claims, the ones that were successfully prosecuted in just one year, came about as a result of assault, battery, unlawful imprisonment, malicious prosecution, breach of duty, and more.

The significant issue of the crisis that is exposed by the statistics about police misconduct, and the death of Claire Nowland, is that people who become victims of the police have very few avenues to achieve justice.

The vast majority of reports about police misconduct are left completely at the discretion of other police officers, even the highest profile

cases of police assaulting innocent people are often simply referred to neighbouring police commands. Police investigating police is a serious problem, as is a barrier to reform and cultural change.

Police have an enormous amount of power in NSW. We therefore need a truly independent oversight body that is systematically removed from NSW Police and free from compromising relationships.

In NSW we have the LECC, otherwise known as the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission. The LECC receives thousands of complaints every year but only investigates 2% of those received. Due to budget and resourcing restrictions, the rest of these complaints are referred back to NSW Police for internal investigation. This is not how we achieve police integrity and accountability, and the cultural change we need to shift bad policing in NSW.

The capacity of the LECC to act as a truly independent oversight authority for the NSW Police goes beyond just their funding or staffing. Last week, I wrote to the Chief Commissioner of the LECC, requesting that they conduct an inquiry in to the police response to Ms Clare Nowland and was shocked when I received a response that under the current law the LECC cannot commence an investigation itself, but the Commissioner of Police can refer the matter with a recommendation that the LECC

investigate it. It is absolutely unacceptable that there is any circumstance where only the Police Commissioner is the determiner as to whether an oversight authority is able to complete their function.

In the last year, public reports and reports received by my office indicate a litany of failures by NSW Police to discharge their primary duty of protecting the public. The last 12 months have seen a spate of violent policing, including Sydney personality Danny-Lim who was assaulted by police in November last year and a 14-year old First Nations boy who ended up in hospital with head injuries in Coraki in September after police chased him down and arrested him.

The NSW Police have also been recently reported for harassing international and domestic visitors that attended World Pride events in Sydney. Then there is the excessive policing of protesters, including the midnight home arrest of a student housing advocate over a simple trespass charge that had allegedly happened hours before.

This targeted and discriminatory approach to policing should be considered an unacceptable relic of the past, but unfortunately we don't seem to have made positive progress. Our approach to policing is not fit for purpose – there should be ways for people to get assistance without any risk of violence, such as having social workers and people, including police, trained specifically in



Claire Nowland, 95, well respected and appreciated within her community, passed away on 24th May, surrounded by family and loved ones, having been in Cooma Hospital for a week after being tasered by a NSW police officer at her residence, Yallambee Lodge, at around 4.15am on 17th May, which caused her to fall and fracture her skull. Reports of those who have seen the officer's bodycam footage, which has not been made public, allege that Ms Nowland posed no tangible threat at the time of the incident and that the officer who deployed the taser says, "Oh bugger it" before discharging the weapon. Snowy-Monaro Mayor Narelle Davis described the incident as heartbreaking. Photo courtesy the Nowland family

nonviolent de-escalation that doesn't involve harming people. In the immediate term the NSW Labor Government, and Treasurer Daniel Mookhey, need to provide

the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission with the necessary funding to fully investigate all reports of police misconduct. It is not in the public interest, nor the effective administration of justice, that police investigate police in these matters, particularly police of the same jurisdiction within which the misconduct has taken place. What has happened to Ms Nowland needs to be a turning point. We cannot have police investigating police anymore. The LECC must have more powers to investigate claims of misconduct – if the tasering of a 95-year old woman in a nursing home leading to her death does not reach the threshold of severity for the LECC to undertake its own investigation, it's time to think about the reforms needed to ensure our police force is a force for good. I have called on the new minority Labor Government to launch a truly independent inquiry into police misconduct that assesses the root and systemic causes of NSW Police assaulting members of the public and provides recommendations that fundamentally change how police are allowed to act and investigate themselves. We cannot let the focus of this tragic incident now all go to the criminal case of the individual officer. While this is important, it's not systemic accountability. We need to stop what happened to Ms Nowland from happening to others. It's not about just this one officer or this one event, this has to be what sparks bold and desperately needed reforms in policing in NSW.

www.suehigginson.org

Fifty years on, the legacy of the Aquarius Festival shines bright

by Janelle Saffin MP, State Member for Lismore

Congratulations to the Nimbin community and all those involved in organising and participating in the successful Aquarius 50th Anniversary Festival last month.

I commend the community for doing such a good job in celebrating the original festival which was such a ground-breaking event when it happened all the way back in 1973.

The first festival ushered in big changes in Australian society that have stood the test of time, most importantly for the need to tread lightly on this planet that we all share.

In the run-up to the March 2023 NSW election, I committed to providing \$50,000 to the Nimbin Chamber of Commerce's Aquarius 50 Organising Committee to help with staging the festival, and I am proud to say that this pledge will be honoured early in the new financial year.

I also participated in several pre-festival meetings and was impressed by the energy and enthusiasm of all those I met.

It was especially pleasing to see plenty of the Aquarius 'originals' present and participating in the 10-day long program of events.

Many of these original festival-goers chose to stay in the Northern Rivers after the 1973 event and ended up transforming our entire region for the better.

In that time, Nimbin has reinvented itself from a small but productive dairy town into a significant tourism destination, playing host to around 100,000 visitors a year who provide much-needed stimulus to the local economy.



Meeting in Nimbin, March 1973
Photo: John van Loendersloot

Repairs and upgrades to iconic local reserves

Last week came welcome news that the Minns Labor Government will invest \$100,000 in repairs and upgrades to Hanging Rock Falls near Nimbin and Bean Creek Falls south of Urbenville.

Hanging Rock Falls in particular was heavily impacted by the floods that hit the Lismore region in early 2022, and the proposed works will make it easier for visitors to access the reserve by rehabilitating the walking track with new handrails, new stair treads and the removal of fallen trees at the site off Williams Road.

Given their stunning beauty, both reserves are magnets for locals and tourists alike and the upgrades will help reinforce the recovery of local economies after a difficult few years.

Crown Lands will spend \$50,000 on remediation works in each reserve.

Focus on regional health

Given my long-term commitment to improving health services and infrastructure across the Northern Rivers, I am very pleased to have been appointed a member of



Hanging Rock Falls. Photo: Bob Caddell

the recently established Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health.

It is absolutely unacceptable that members of the NSW community living outside metropolitan areas experience lower life expectancy and a higher burden of chronic disease.

Under the leadership of my parliamentary colleague Dr Joe McGirr and including strong representation from fellow regional MPs, the Committee is determined to drive change in the way health services are delivered across our regions.

It will build on work undertaken in the Upper House under the last Government that led to comprehensive recommendations to change rural health.

Our committee has strong backing from Health Minister Ryan Park and adds to other recent initiatives announced by the Minns Government, the most important of which is the recruitment of 1200 additional nurses and midwives within the Government's first term.

We all know how much strain our doctors and nurses were under during the Covid-19 pandemic and it makes sense that the initial focus of this new initiative will be on driving safe staffing levels in emergency departments across the public hospital system, including in our local hospitals.

Wishing you all a happy and healthy Winter Solstice!

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Far North Coast CWA Group shines at State Conference

by Allison Kelly

The CWA of NSW Far North Coast Group delegation had an amazing impact at the State Conference held in Bathurst, between the 8th and 11th of May.

They had an impressive success rate with four out of the five Motions ratified by the meeting. Delegates from 12 Far North Coast branches attended the conference, led by Group President Narelle Gotting (Bonalbo Branch), Group Secretary Jean Kutchen (Kyogle Evening Branch), Group Treasurer Gai Mason (Ballina Branch), and our Patron Yvonne Scarabellotti (Ballina Branch).

CWA members proudly belong to an extraordinary movement that advocates for diverse issues affecting everyday people in regional, rural, and remote areas of New South Wales.

Narelle Gotting and Janet Twohill (Mullumbimby Branch) passionately addressed the Motion proposed by Tabulam

Branch, emphasising the community's strong opposition to Waste-to-Energy Incinerators.

Other successful Motions included Lismore Branch's stance on the CWA lobbying to strengthen laws around koala habitat; Old Bonalbo Branch's Invasive Weeds plus Continuous Mobile Phone Coverage in Disasters Motions; and Bangalow Branch together with Mascot Evening Branch invited the CWA to accept the Uluru Statement from the Heart. After the usual procedure of speakers for and against, a secret ballot decided that the Uluru Motion not be put at this time.

We also received the results from the 2022 survey, which showed membership is growing but is predominantly made up of members of European heritage aged 65 and over, showing little diversity, which needs to be addressed.

Kerry Harvey, (Lismore Evening Branch) and Allison Kelly (Lismore Branch), were given an opportunity to thank the



CWA for their generous support of the region both from the individual Branch support we received, and the \$500,000 received from the CWA State Office Disaster Fund.

The State Conference's Twinning Dinner was a lively affair, filled with joy and camaraderie. Gwydir Group is our twin group and every State Conference we take it in turns to host a dinner together. The evening was a testament to the strong bonds and shared experiences among the attendees.

The Far North Coast delegation truly made its mark at the CWA State Conference, both in terms of successful Motions and personal achievements. Their commitment to fostering community, celebrating culture, and advocating for important causes sets a shining example for others.

If you have ever thought about joining the CWA, we highly recommend you contact your local Branch (see: cwaofnsw.org.au) and learn just how much fun, friendship and fundraising can bring to your life.

Boost for koalas with signing of first conservation agreement



Kyogle property owner Tony Rowland has become the first person to sign a permanent conservation agreement as part of a Collaborative Koala Habitat Protection project in the Northern Rivers.

The World Wide Fund for Nature – Australia, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, the Biodiversity Conservation Trust and Envite Environment have partnered to invest funds and encourage permanent conservation agreements for private landholders to protect, restore and manage koala habitat on their land in the Northern Rivers region.

Tony's forest contains a critically endangered shrub called scrub turpentine, koala food trees such as forest red gum, small-fruited grey gum, and tallowwood, and is home to threatened species including koalas, black-striped wallabies, glossy black-cockatoos and giant barred frogs.

The conservation agreement covers about 20 hectares of the 28 hectare property.

"These conservation agreements are a win for landholders and the environment and I'd encourage other people to sign up," Tony Rowland said.

"My aim is to leave the forest in better shape than it was when I bought it.

"That will give the wildlife a chance to live. There are so many threatened

species; it's heartbreaking. I want my property to be a conservation area forever so no-one can ruin all my hard work," he said.

Tony has certainly been working hard to restore his forest. For the last five years, he's been removing, by hand, a serious lantana infestation.

The lantana was so thick it prevented koalas from moving about the property, and smothered native grasses and young trees like she-oaks, which are the only food source for glossy black-cockatoos.

With big areas of lantana removed, native grasses returned providing food for black-striped wallabies.

Tony said the task of restoring a forest can feel overwhelming. But in recent years, he has received much-appreciated help from NSW government officers

and some local groups to identify weeds, tackle lantana, and learn more about the tree species and wildlife in his forest.

Two nest boxes for glossy black-cockatoos have just been installed. A cultural burn, overseen by Indigenous experts, is being organised partly to reduce fuel loads in the cooler weather when fires are easier to control.

"A lot of native grasses and grass trees need a burn to propagate," Tony said.

Signing the conservation agreement locks in further assistance. A site action plan is written for each property. Agreement holders can apply for grants to control weeds and pest animals, conduct supplementary revegetation with koala food trees, put up fencing to exclude stock, and install nest boxes.

Tony will receive more help to tackle the remaining lantana infestation at the back of the property.

"Lantana is by far the biggest enemy," Tony said.

Tanya Pritchard, Landscape Restoration Project Manager, WWF-Australia, said another six property owners were in the final stages of signing conservation agreements, including three others in Kyogle, and more in the Tweed, Clarence Valley, and Lismore.

"WWF is proud to be supporting landholders to protect precious koalas



and other species. Every hectare protected is going to help us turn things around for koalas and take a step closer towards their recovery," Tanya said.

"We are interested in land of a high conservation value, that connects areas of habitat, and is within a koala priority population area.

"The protection and restoration of existing habitat helps koalas and many other species living alongside them.

"WWF and the NSW Government are working together to reverse the decline of koalas in NSW," she said.

WWF's funding support for the conservation agreements is thanks to the many Australians who have donated to Regenerate Australia.

About Regenerate Australia

WWF's Regenerate Australia is the largest and most innovative wildlife recovery and landscape regeneration program in Australia's history. Launched by WWF-Australia in October 2020, the multi-year program will rehabilitate, repopulate and restore wildlife and habitats affected by the 2019-2020 bushfires, and help to future-proof Australia against the impacts of changing climate.

Find out more and help Regenerate Australia at: www.wwf.org.au/regenerate-australia



by Nimbin Community Centre
Management Committee

Moving forward

Nimbin Community Centre Inc owns and manages the community centre (eight buildings on two acres of heritage-listed grounds), Birth & Beyond and Aquarius Park.

Faced with increasing expenses and the care of old buildings, we have spent the past year looking at ways to deal with this into the future.

Rents from tenants, combined with grant funding, have kept everything afloat for over 25 years. While we have funds set aside for things like major roof repairs there is not enough to cover our escalating costs and needs into the future. Consequently, we have spent a challenging year looking at how we can do things differently.

It's been a rough ride. We engaged a business consultant through the Federal government's entrepreneurship program who sowed seeds for thought and pointed us in a new direction. We'd like to share some of the results of that process with you by outlining the changes we're implementing.

Position Vacant – Property Manager

A major change will be a greater emphasis on property management. The role of property manager is currently being advertised at 21 hours a week. We wish it were full-time. The role involves care of our buildings alongside looking after our grounds and serving as a first point of contact for tenants and those interested in using facilities and services that we house.

At the same time, we are moving out of the office we have occupied for 25 years. We have looked at this before but have always resisted as we enjoy having main street frontage and being a valuable point of contact for locals and visitors. We are moving our office into another, less prominent space and will share with Jungle Patrol into the future. Thank you to them for agreeing to our request.

Our current office facing Cullen Street will be advertised for rent once we have moved, probably later this year as we need to fit out our new space to meet the requirements of ourselves, and Jungle Patrol.

Position Vacant – Digital Communications Manager

In addition, we are moving much of our operation into

a digital environment. We are currently advertising for a digital communications manager, a position that will also dedicate a few hours a week to supporting our local Chamber of Commerce meet their digital needs. In order for this to be effective we have worked extensively on our website over the past year and hope to boost our social media presence into the future.

We will continue to have a bookkeeper, and a cleaner for the spaces we hire out for the many groups in our community, but many roles carried out by staff in the past will be managed on a voluntary level by the management committee.

To this end we are looking to young, enthusiastic community members to join our committee with a view to the aged committee members stepping down at our AGM in November. We currently have at least two and maybe four young people and are on the hunt for more.

Aquarius Park

A major challenge for us into the future will be the care and development of Aquarius Park. Once the Rainbow Road walking track is finished Aquarius Park will become a key feature of the track with maintenance and enhancement becoming our responsibility. While we have no regrets about the decision we made to purchase this land, in partnership with many other community organisations and individuals, it does present challenges.

We have formed a Landcare group and we hope to attract support through Landcare initiatives and local community groups taking on specific areas. It will undoubtedly develop into a beautiful and treasured community resource – peaceful, away from the madding crowd.

We recently gave Council access to the Sibley Street end of this property so they can conduct investigations into connecting the Alternative Way footpath to Sibley Street footpath, something the community has been pushing for.

Rents

Beyond the impacts of the pandemic and local bushfires on us, we are also facing the challenges presented by climate change. We have more and more tenants with air conditioners, increasing our energy requirements. We are facing many roof replacements in coming years as leaks and rust become more evident. We have installed water tanks but would love more. We have undertaken major upgrades to protect against the impacts of fire.

All of these things come at a cost. Around 14% of our rental income goes to insurance companies. Council rates and charges accounts for 7%. Almost 60% goes

to salaries. This does not leave much for the costs of maintain extensive grounds and buildings, not to mention improvements. Their current condition is somewhat indicative of this. There are so many things we would love to do but can't. However, maintenance of our assets into the future is of critical importance, and is to become our priority.

Finally, we have had to look closely at the rents we charge. This is always very hard and vexed as no tenant wants to pay higher rent, but we have to meet our increasing costs. For years we had leases tied to the CPI. With a CPI around 2-3% this was not meeting our increasing needs. The CPI is 7% for this coming year but many tenants have leases that only allow for a maximum 5% increase, no matter the CPI.

We are gradually introducing new leases that will allow for annual increases in rent up to 10%. Hopefully inflation will continue to drop and increases of this nature will never be necessary, but we need to plan for the future.

Into the future

As you can imagine, changes of this nature have involved hours and days of meetings by a truly committed group of volunteers, all of whom have strong roots in our community and understand the pressures everyone is under.

Our priority will always be to support community, but we also have valued commercial tenants. These tenants pay higher rents, but even they have limits.

In looking to outside funding sources beyond grants, which are rarely available to cover wage costs or necessities like insurance and maintenance, we have some enthusiastic event organisers who would like to help us raise funds. This may become a major focus into the future. We are also exploring other fundraising opportunities and, as a not-for-profit organisation, any benefits will flow to community.

During this transitional period, we would like to acknowledge the incredible work of everyone involved in elements of our organisation, but particularly those who give their time free of charge or at significantly reduced rates. Many of the groups we house also rely on this volunteer input, support that is critical to the future of valuable community owned resources and the services they provide. Volunteers are arguably the backbone of our community and we acknowledge and honour you.

If you are interested in the advertised positions mentioned above or would like more information about anything, please visit our website: nimbincommunity.org.au or email: nccl@nimbincommunity.org.au

That merry month of May



Chamber Chat

by David Hyett, President

The original Aquarius festival was ground-breaking in 1973, and we have done it again in 2023 with the Aquarius50 anniversary celebrations.

We thank the First Nations people for their presence and cultural engagement, for maintaining custodianship of the land that we are now able to call our home. We are committed to acknowledging your contribution to the quality of life that we all now enjoy and continue work towards fairness and respect in all aspects of our co-existence moving forward.

Congratulations go out to all members of the Nimbin community as well as those in the wider community who hold a special place in their hearts for Nimbin. An amazing effort was made by all in highlighting what our community has to offer the world.

The Aquarian elders were honoured for the influence that they have had in shaping the Rainbow Region, introducing the values that most of us now hold dear to our hearts.

Supporters of the anniversary were treated to a wide array of engaging activities which included culture, health and well-being, spiritual practices, environmental issues, community, art music, fashion and music, much of which has been captured on film.

The youth were engaged with art, storytelling, entertainment, workshops, skatepark action and music, and by all accounts had a wonderful time, much to the delight of parents.

Ten days of programming a wide range of events was quite a challenge, but we succeeded in presenting a program of high-quality content in all genres.

Special thanks go out to Jeni Kendall, Michael Balderstone, Jenny Cornish, Nic Lindner, Benny Zable, Caroline Todd, Greg Bork, Dex Tallo, Annie McGovern, Pat Miller, Binnah Pownall, Michael Fairley, Johnny Allen, Graham Dunstan, Jagad Samuel, to name but a few, who spent many hours leading up to, during, and after the event, ensuring all contingencies were covered, making sure we had a program that was diverse, interesting and cost effective.

To those of you who are not mentioned but played a part in ensuring Aquarius50 became a reality, thank you



Deputy Mayor Jeri Hall, David Hyett and Lismore Mayor Steve Krieg at the Aquarius Elders Dinner.

so much on behalf of the community of Nimbin. The village is still resonating with the energy that accompanied the anniversary activities, and will do so for time to come.

Thank you to the businesses and individuals that contributed to the costs of running the festival – we could not have done it without you.

The State Labor government represented by Janelle Saffin was particularly generous with a grant of \$50,000, as was the Lismore Council, the Nimbin Chamber of Commerce, the Hemp Embassy and Christopher Dean with donations of \$10,000 or more each.

The financial outcome of the festival is looking sound, and hopefully we will remain in the black after all disbursements are made.

Trading on the main street was reported to be very buoyant for both the shops and the day traders, of which there were many. Future benefits will also come from revisitations. Perhaps some of our visitors will make Nimbin their home one day?

A big shout out to the Mayor Steve Krieg and Deputy Mayor Jeri Hall for attending events, signalling council's appreciation of our communities' efforts to draw

interest to our unique village.

It would be remiss of me not to thank the Hemp Embassy for organising another successful MardiGrass which preceded the Aquarius50 celebrations. The push towards legalising cannabis in Australia has been at the forefront of the Embassy's agenda for many years, and great strides have been made to have this medicine available to the public without reproach.

Thank you to all involved in the planning and execution of another successful Nimbin MardiGrass event.

June may be a little quieter, with many of us having a rest before we gear up for September.

The ball starts rolling again with the Spring Arts Festival at the Town Hall, as well as the return of the very successful Illuminate Nimbin. This event, back by popular demand, is funded by Lismore Council and managed by the Nimbin Chamber.

Illuminate Nimbin promises to be a night of fun for the whole family.

With our members' continued support, we look forward to building a better, stronger, and more vibrant village for our children and the community as a whole.

www.nimbinaustralia.com



Thanks to all who contributed in any way to the success of the Nimbin Aquarius Festival 50th Anniversary Commemoration.
May the Aquarian ideals and spirit long live on.

What would we do without you?



The Southern Cassowary is a keystone seed disperser in Nth QLD rainforests
Photo: dchrisoh



Mangroves may decline with the loss of keystone invertebrates
Photo: John Turnbull



Sandalwood is a keystone plant in semi-arid areas of SE West Australia
Photo: Jean and Fed Hort

by Scott O’Keeffe, ecologist

Some organisms exert more influence over their environments than their size, abundance or prominence might suggest. Lose or remove them and the ecological consequences will be catastrophic. Their ecosystems maybe lost altogether or transformed into something completely different. Swamps can become grasslands. Grasslands can become forests. Woodlands can become deserts. Conventional wisdom suggests that the stability of an ecosystem depends upon its diversity of organisms and the relationships between them. This is partly true, but it’s an incomplete picture. Recent ecological research shows that the strength of relationships between organisms varies. **Keystone** species have links within the ecosystem that are so strong and pervasive that they provide the cement that holds everything else together. Large, charismatic familiar animals they are often used as examples of the concept. Jaguars (*Panthera onca*) in South and Central America regulate herbivores and prevent overgrazing in wetlands and woodlands. In the Rocky Mountains of North America, Grey Wolves (*Canis lupus*) regulate grazing by Elk (*Cervus elaphus*) and ensure the integrity of Willow thickets and Aspen forests. In Australia, the Tasmanian Devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) is a keystone predator that suppresses feral cats (*Felis catus*). The Devils’ keystone role has become evident during its rapid decline from facial tumour disease. This has allowed feral cats to increase and become a serious threat to native animals that the native Eastern Quoll (*Dasyurus viverrinus*) depends upon. Cats also prey on Quolls as well as their food source. **Mutualist** species are those that interact mutually beneficial ways: each provides something that the other organism needs. Some of the associations between mutualist species are so strong that one of the partners acts as a keystone species for the entire ecosystem. An extreme example is the Southern Cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius*). Cassowaries are seed predators that consume a wide variety of rainforest plant fruits. Many of the trees in north Queensland where Cassowaries occur produce seeds with flesh that the birds find very attractive. Cassowaries feed preferentially on these and provide the plants with a vital dispersal mechanism. The seed passes through the bird’s gut even though the flesh is digested. The seed will be voided

in a nice pile of fertiliser, ready to start the next generation of tree. If Cassowaries were to disappear from these forests, many of the tree species that depend upon them for dispersal would perish. This can result in a cascade effect where other plants and animals that depend upon the trees might also be adversely affected. Some animal activities profoundly alter the physical environments in which they live. In doing so, they will create new living spaces, food and opportunities for a wide range of other organisms. In eco-speak, this type of keystone is an ecosystem engineer that creates new niche spaces in an ecosystem. The most cited example of this is the Beaver (*Castor canadensis*). These large rodents create vast networks of wetlands and ponds through their dam-building and tree-cutting activities. A huge array of species is dependent upon these creations. In Australia’s tropical savannahs and woodlands, we have something like an equivalent. The enormous termite mounds that populate the landscape are the colonies of subterranean termites - huge colonies that shape the vegetation in the tropical landscape in much the same way that large herbivores do. The catacomb network constructed by the termites increases water infiltration in the soil and termite activity adds large amounts of organic matter to the soil, increasing microbial activity and providing nutrients, such as nitrogen for plants. Together with their arboreal relatives, termites also affect the frequency and intensity of fires. I first grasped this after trying to chop up some very hard, dry eucalyptus logs while reflecting on a quip from an old bushie. He said, “if it weren’t for the termites, we’d all be up to our ears in nice dry fuel, just waiting for a lightning strike.” Point taken. Termites are also excellent food. Since they are superabundant, they are an important part of the diet of many tropical woodland animals. To top it off, the big termite mounds also provide important breeding sites for cavity nesting animals, such as parrots and kingfishers. Some keystone species are referred to as nutrient shifters responsible for relocating prodigious quantities of minerals and biomass from one landscape to another. The seasonal salmon migration in rivers on the west coast of North America, for example, support entire ecosystems on shorelines and riversides where predators gather and the bodies of spent salmon

wash up in the millions. Over millennia, the spread of carcasses, carrion and faeces over the entire landscape maintains high nutrient levels and soil microbial activity. This supports towering forests of massive trees and all the other organisms that depend upon them. A similar, but less obvious example in Australia is the Bogong Moth (*Agrostis infusa*), which breeds on the inland plains of south-eastern Australia. When the moths complete their breeding cycle they migrate in their billions to the Australian Alps. Here, they spend the summer aestivating (a dormant state similar to hibernation) in alpine rock caves, crags and crevices where they are protected from extremes in temperature, and provide a rich food source for birds, fish, microbats and small mammals including the endangered Mountain Pygmy Possum (*Burramys parvus*). The warmer fertile inland breeding grounds provide nutrients for the harsh alpine landscape, to which the moths return at the end of summer. Since all terrestrial life depends upon plants, it is no surprise that many plants are keystone species in some ecosystems. The Australian Sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*) is a keystone species that supports a great diversity of fauna in harsh semi-arid inland areas of West Australia with a range of **ecosystem services**. Sandalwoods provide more food resources, protection from predation, breeding sites, refuge from extreme heat and more rapid soil nutrient cycling than similar trees in the same environment. Once widespread, Sandalwood has become scarce due to land clearing and merciless cutting for the fragrant wood and oil used to make incense and perfume. The remaining wild trees are old and there is very little natural regeneration. There must be thousands of other keystone plants that we are not yet aware of. My final example concerns mangrove ecosystems. Their rich diversity is well documented, but unlike many ecosystems, is not necessarily dependent upon the size of the stand. Even small patches of mangroves may be highly bio diverse. Yet many mangrove ecosystems are collapsing without an obvious cause. Recent research suggests the declines seem to be associated with the loss of a few species of invertebrates that may be acting as keystones. We’re not sure, but ecological research might need to shift its gaze from large, easily studied organisms, to the small but highly significant assemblages of invertebrates, micro-organisms and fungi.

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Plant of the month



Along our watercourses in the area can be found this common, pretty and valuable stream bank protector, Creek Lilly Pilly. White flowers in summer give way to edible attractive purple fruit in late autumn and early winter, and this month they are abundant and ready for picking for propagation on your next conservation project. A common creek bank restoration species, Creek Lilly Pilly is a must in your species list when rehabilitation of creek banks and riparian vegetation enhancement is concerned. Easy to propagate and purchase from your local rainforest nursery, this species is a good all-round species anywhere on the farm and the large garden as it makes a good screen plant and habitat. Interestingly the name Lilly Pilly is of uncertain origin, and it may be an Aboriginal or European children’s name.

Responsible dog ownership

Byron Shire Council rangers are stepping up patrols in response to rising complaints about dog behaviour in the Byron Shire. “Council wants to make it clear that dog owners are responsible for the behaviour of their animals,” Council’s Public and Environmental Services Manager, Sarah Nagel said. “If you take your dog to a prohibited area or your dog is not on a lead when it’s supposed to be – you will be fined,” she said. Ms Nakel reminds residents and visitors that dogs should be kept on a lead if it does not reliably come when called, including in designated off-lead areas around the Shire. Owners, carers and dog walkers are liable for the actions of dogs under their control and can be prosecuted and even jailed if injuries are caused by their dogs. “We’ve learned recently about the high numbers of dog attacks in the last quarter of 2022 across NSW – as reported by the Office of Local Government – and our message is that people need to take their responsibilities as dog owners seriously – or you could be putting other dogs and people’s lives at risk,” Ms Nagel said. “Ultimately, we want off-lead areas to be safe and friendly places for dogs, their owners and the general public,” she said. “The majority of dog owners are doing the right thing but it’s a small percentage of people who are ruining it for everyone else and creating dangerous situations on our beaches,” she said.

Byron Shire’s beach off-lead rules:

- Know the on-lead, off-lead and prohibited dog areas or you could get a fine – they’re all on Council’s website and it’s your responsibility to know where you can and can’t go before you get to the beach.
 - Do you have voice control over your dog? If your dog won’t reliably come when called, they are not ready to be off a lead.
 - Don’t let your dog run up to another dog. Check with its owner first to see if your dog can say hello.
 - Respect other people’s space and put your dog on a lead when arriving and leaving the off lead dog beach.
 - Take a bag and pick up your dog’s poo and place in bins provided. Do not leave on beach.
- Find out everything you need to know about being a responsible dog owner from Council’s website: www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Community/Pets/Dog-owner-responsibilities



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Pressure mounts to bring Julian home

by John Jiggins

Over the past month, Australian pressure on the Biden administration to drop the charges against Julian Assange has grown significantly.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese earned the gratitude of Assange's father, John Shipton, by leading the call for the charges to be dropped, making his strongest statement yet on the Assange issue on 4th May declaring: "The US administration is certainly very aware of what the Australian government's position is. There is nothing to be served by his on-going incarceration."

On 9th May, members of the Parliamentary Friends of the Bring Julian Assange Home Group, a cross-party alliance of 48 senators and members of the House of Representatives, met with the US ambassador Caroline Kennedy to convey the warning that the continuing persecution of Julian Assange endangered the US-Australian alliance.

Three days later, on 12th May, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the most rabid backers of the coming war with China, published an editorial, which concluded:

"The time has come to end this sorry saga. In our new spirit of friendship, the visit by the US president is surely an opportunity for the governments to show and share some common humanity."

The poll accompanying the editorial showed 79% of Australians wanted the Biden administration to drop its pursuit of Assange, while another 8% were unsure, and only 13% agreed with the continuing US prosecution.

As he prepared for his trip to Australia, the Prime Minister, the Parliament, the press and the public had sent President Biden an unambiguous message.

Like the *SMH* editorial, many Assange supporters were hoping that President Biden's proposed visit to Australia would lead to the charges against Assange being dropped. Ending the Assange persecution would have been an easy gift for Biden, unlike the \$368 billion the Australian people were being asked to cough up for the war chest of the empire.

The Assange Campaign had organised a protest rally and march, in Sydney for Wednesday, 24th May, the day Biden was expected in town for the QUAD meeting. Julian's closest family, Stella Assange, Julian's wife, Julian's brother Gabriel Shipton, and Julian's father, John Shipton, would speak at the rally.

Arrangements were made for Stella to speak at the National Press Club on 22nd May, and to meet with the Parliamentary Friends of the Bring Julian Assange Home



Stella Assange and Stephen Kenny, Julian Assange's Australian lawyer, leading a protest march in Sydney on 24th May. Photo courtesy WSWS

Group on 23rd May, as well as speaking at the rally on Wednesday.

Although Biden's non-appearance deprived Assange's family of a focus for their protest, it left the media space open for Stella Assange, who filled it brilliantly, starring at the Press Club and charming even the 7.30 Report's Sarah Ferguson.

Stella's address to the National Press Club had me on the verge of tears, as she detailed Julian's bleak imprisonment in his two-metre by three-metre cell in HMP Belmarsh, the maximum security prison where he has spent his last 1500 days, locked down for 22 hours each day, and the long queues she and her two young children must endure to see their husband and father.

She recalled how Assange would tell his sons about the life he had lived in Australia, catching yabbies and going fishing for flathead and black fish in the Sandon River with his grandfather Warren. Of how he reared a fledgling rainbow lorikeet when he lived on Magnetic Island when he was 13, feeding the lorikeet on mangos until it was strong enough to re-join the wild.

"He tells the children about Tilly, the chestnut-coated mare which he would ride when he stayed in the Northern Rivers. Or how he surfed in Byron Bay as a teenager. He tells them about his beekeeping in the Dandenong Ranges in Victoria.

"That's how I imagine Julian when he is free. Not behind the cold blue glare of a computer screen, but cycling through Melbourne like he used to, or feeling his bare feet sink into the cool sand, like I did yesterday on Bondi beach," Stella said.

"Today, Julian's feet only feel the hard, dull, even cement on the prison floor. When he goes to the yard for exercise, there is no grass, no sand. Just the bitumen paving surrounded by cameras and layers of razor wire overhead."

Partnered with Jen Robinson in the following Q+A, the duo effortlessly dispatched the often embarrassingly ignorant questions of the Australian press.



John Shipton speaking at the AQ50 Elders Dinner. Photo Sue Stock

The one question from the Murdoch media came from a young woman, representing The Australian, who asked: "Julian Assange has long defended his actions by saying he is a journalist. However, much of the leaked material he has published came from Russia and had a major impact on the US election. Would it be acceptable for me as a journalist to publish stolen emails from Australian politicians supplied by China, and what would you say about allegations he is a propagandist for Russia?"

Since the material Assange faces extradition over came from Chelsea Manning, a US intelligence analyst, this was misinformation, followed by smear – a clumsy attempt to vilify Assange that provoked laughter from the Press Club audience.

Following the Press Club, Stella Assange met with many of the 48 members of the Parliamentary Group to Bring Julian Assange home, although PM Albanese, a member of that group, did not attend, and declined a private meeting with Stella.

On 24th May, along with John and Gabriel Shipton, Stella Assange addressed a gathering of Assange supporters in Sydney's Hyde

Park. She began by thanking the audience, before declaring, to wild applause: "This is my first time to your land and it won't be my last, obviously, because I'm going to come back home here with Julian and our kids, they're Australian citizens, will come home too."

The speech was a rallying call to Australian supporters, who she declared were at the forefront of a global movement for justice.

"We've reached a turning point because they know that we know that they are wrong, and that they are cruel and that they are torturing Julian because he did the right thing, because he is in prison because he exposed the crimes of others; and that no decent human being will ever tolerate that. The only people whose interest remains in Julian's imprisonment are the ones who are guilty and implicated in those crimes."

She ended with a simple plea for her husband's life: "Let this man be. Let him live! Enough is enough. Let him come home to our children. Let him just have dinner at home. Let him sit on the couch. Let him take a nap. Let him feel the air on his skin. It's been denied to him for so long. Let's make it happen, you guys. Thank you."

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Virtual impossibilities

In this life there are a number of virtual impossibilities. It is impossible to hear yourself think on a speedway night, it is impossible to talk to a someone from claims while sales could not be more prompt to answering your call.

But of all the things that just can't be achieved; on top of the list are successful referendums scheduled by Labor governments.



Revenge of the Loon
by Laurie Axtens

I kid you not – these are a few of the Labor proposed referendum questions that failed to make it into our Constitution; a provision that elections be fair; a provision that Australians be extended the right to trial by jury, freedom of religion, and fair terms for persons whose property is acquired by any government. Those failed – none of those things are assured in our constitution.

Later this year Labor will try again to change the constitution – to recognise that Indigenous Australians have been on this land for over 60 thousand years and consequently that they should be offered a separate voice to parliament, to offer guidance. It's a referendum based on a polite request by 250 Indigenous delegates from over a hundred nations in what is called the 'statement from the heart' – read it – it's two paragraphs long.

Sounds like a no-brainer – a bit like insuring fair elections or a fair trial...

And the sad truth about what is essentially a symbolic gesture of recognition is that if it's voted down this will set back indigenous affairs for many generations; it will force it out to the periphery of political discourse for the foreseeable future just as the republic referendum loss did. And it will undermine any hope of a treaty. Why indulge the idea of a treaty when the population don't even want to recognise prior custodianship?

The only thing about virtual impossibilities and hoodoos – is that one day they break – one day despite all the odds, all the nay-saying and all the defeatism – yes wins.

We answer the 'Statement from the Heart' with a big heart-felt yes. And the bleeding obvious makes it into our foundation document.

A moment

by S Sorrensen

The mob is heaving to the beat. The crowd begins on the footpath, but soon spills onto the road as it grows. At its heart, a man surrounded by musical instruments plays saxophone over a rhythm he'd looped. I linger on the periphery taking this opportunity to taste the joy emanating from the gathering. I'm anxious.

When algorithms replace leadership, when control replaces compassion, when the future is as uncertain as a Jetstar departure time, it's therapeutic to just let go of all that, to simply follow the saxophone as it spirals giddily into the moment, this moment, the drum and bass nailing some surety onto the now. Here and now. It feels good. I trust it. (And no, I haven't had drugs.)

A woman dressed in a sparkling green dress and green-and-black striped socks spins to the music, her arms held straight up, twining one around the other, her face tilted to the moon, her eyes closed, her smile widening, her wings flapping.

Ganja Faerie. Nimbin. MardiGrass. There is something medieval about MardiGrass. MardiGrass – or, more correctly, the MardiGrass Cannabis Law Reform March and Rally – has all the colour, diversity and chaos of those medieval celebrations described by Chaucer and shown in countless movies since. It's human. It's vibrant. It's diverse.



And, here at MardiGrass, it's rebellious.

A man, shaved-headed, gym-muscle and holding a can of bourbon and coke, pushes into the crowd, shoving the Ganja Faerie, his dancing a drunken stumble. I don't like drunks.

The cops have gone home. They clock off at five. Good. No village wants packs of young men with guns wandering the street at night. Yes, I get angry at the cops and the government with this ridiculous war on drugs. I get angry at drunk young men bouncing into fairies. Anger breeds anxiety. I'm anxious.

Elsewhere on the street, there are clusters of people, some lit by the stark council street lights, some by the soft festival lights. Some groups are noticed only by the flare of a joint as it bounces from toker to toker, like the ball in some

silent karaoke.

The drunk man trips heavily into the Ganja Faerie. She falls to the bitumen, crumpling a wing. Oh no! The man lands hard on his elbow. He grimaces in pain. Good.

People around the pair stop their dancing and crouch down to help. The drunk bloke angrily refuses help. The Ganja Faerie points to her knee and a woman in a 'I love NY' t-shirt pulls the faerie's sock down to reveal scratches. An older man, with two remaining dreadlocks, hands the NY t-shirt woman a small jar. She opens it, and rubs it on the faerie's knee.

MardiGrass is a rally to reform drug laws. It started in 1993 and the people who organise it have always said they will keep the rally going until the harmful drug laws are changed in NSW. At times over the years, I have doubted that Nimbin's MardiGrass could hold out against the government with its constant harassment. But it has. How? Is there a secret weapon?

The Ganja Faerie flexes her knee and smiles up at the people gathered around her. She takes the jar from the NY t-shirt woman, and leans over to the drunk man. She scrapes some balm from the jar and rubs it on the man's grazed elbow. What? He hurt you!

He looks at her in awe. I look at her in awe. He says thank you. I say thank you.

Kindness is the not-so-secret weapon. Kindness is human, an irresistible force that unites and brings joy to the streets. Kindness wins. Some times I forget that.

Ah, Nimbin.

Kinship Festival

The Kinship Festival is an annual event held in Murwillumbah on 27th May celebrating Aboriginal culture that encapsulates culture, belonging, participation and connection to land people.

People from all walks of life were invited to see and appreciate local indigenous culture.

It was a day of community and culture, with Aboriginal dancing, Elders storytelling, First Nations Healing Space and workshops, free children's nature crafts and activities, and much more.

Cartoonist and Zine publisher Holly English, Craig Scanlan in wheelchair, president of the Suffolk Park community garden, local musician Cleis Pierce, and Rapha, who also works in the community garden.



Logging koalas to extinction

by Dailan Pugh, NEFA spokesperson

The North East Forest Alliance is calling upon the NSW and Commonwealth Environment Ministers to urgently intervene to protect the most important koala habitat identified by their governments, after an assessment of the Forestry Corporation's 12-month Plan of Logging Operations for the NSW north coast found they include 41,000 ha of Nationally Important Koala Areas and 2,700 ha of Koala Hubs.

Both Governments have undertaken

assessments to identify the most important koala habitat for protection, and yet they have allowed the Forestry Corporation to continue logging these habitats without any changes to the inadequate 2018 logging rules, even in areas where koalas were decimated by the 2019/20 wildfires.

In 2021, the Commonwealth identified Nationally Important Koala Areas "as priority koala habitat for incorporation into state protected areas". On the North Coast, 233,945 ha (23.6%) of Nationally Important Koala Areas occur on State forests.

In 2017, the Office of Environment and

Heritage analysed Koala records "to delineate highly significant local scale areas of koala occupancy currently known for protection". On the North Coast, 15,318 ha (24.4%) of Koala Hubs occur on State forests.

NEFA's report *Logging Koalas to Extinction* compared these identified priority areas with the Forestry Corporation's May 2023, 12-month Plan of Operations for logging, to quantify how much of this most important mapped Koala habitat is now being logged.

Their plan contains 40,803 ha of Nationally Important Koala Areas, with 9,634 ha actively being logged today. In addition, the plan contains 2,716 ha of Koala Hubs, with 528 ha in compartments actively being logged right now.

To add to the problem, 16,855 ha (41%) of this nationally significant habitat was burnt in the 2019/20 wildfires, so the resident Koalas are already severely depleted,

The Governments are spending hundreds of millions to protect bits and pieces of Koala habitat, and plant seedling feed trees, on private lands. On public lands they spend tens of millions each year to subsidise logging of thousands of hectares of Koala habitat while cutting down tens of thousands of the mature feed trees they need for food and shelter.

If our governments were genuine about saving North Coast Koalas, they would immediately protect the 234,000 ha of Nationally Important Koala Areas and 15,000 ha of Koala Hubs they identified on State forests.

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From Nepal to Nimbin...

by Michael Balderstone

On the last day of Aquarius50, I was walking down the path past the skatepark with the big hemp rope for Philippe Petit's brief balancing walk at Benny's closing ceremony and found myself walking beside a woman I'd not seen before.

Katherine somebody from Gippsland. She had come to Aquarius in 1973 and it had an enormous impact on her life. She went back home and spent the next fifty years teaching art in one form or another. And now she had returned for the fiftieth birthday and enjoyed a wonderful ten days she said. People like her were exactly what the Aquarius birthday party was about.

There wasn't a big crowd at all but a great vibe and a lot of love going around. Several times it looked like some sort of special aged care home for old hippies. Once at least there was a walking frame traffic jam in front of the Hall.

In 1973 I was wandering the Himalayas and had never heard of Nimbin. Those weeks smoking hash, legal then in Nepal, and hanging out in villages with simple lifestyle happy people changed my life forever.

The women would head off together in the morning laughing as they went, returning hours later carrying giant bundles of sticks on their backs; enough to cook with and warm the night. The men would be building or restoring houses together or working in the terraced fields. Together, working

together, laughing and joking.

I was fresh out of the stockbrokers ties I'd burnt on the fire at my farewell party in London only months before. I'd never seen such happy people. I was used to going to work on the Tube, nobody looking at each other, faces buried in newspapers. It was another universe altogether here in the mountains.

I slept on a platform with a big family, and the fire. It was like I had discovered real life at last. The people were trusting, welcoming, unpretentious, and happy.

I got riddled with head lice, but it didn't seem to matter. Somewhere I was hungry for real raw life, kind of opposite to pin-striped double-breasted suits. Most of the next decade I spent wandering the East trying to work out where I'd fit in, looking for a community of like-minded people.

I visited Nimbin several times, camped in the visitors paddock at Tumble once, but kept returning to India where I was left alone.

Eventually I moved here in the mid 80s and soon after realised this was the community I'd been dreaming of and looking for. People who saw life through the same window I was looking through, and had similar values.

I can only imagine what it was like in Nimbin in 1973.

Hundreds of people taking magic mushrooms together. Not everyone has to eat them for everyone to be affected. It would have been mind blowing. A whole new vision of how we could live in

harmony with each other and the Earth beneath our feet.

It's been brave times for many of us who did our own thing, trusting ourselves to swim in a new direction, taking risks, discovering God, rebelling against the old ways that we saw were destroying the environment.

The hippies were right then and still are now. War is mad; organics is correct; love is the answer. Greed for money and the endless monopoly game we are pressured to play are the problems.

I am eternally grateful to the hippy messengers who keep on keeping on. No question we are slowly winning the war on cannabis with the election of Jeremy Buckingham to the NSW Senate. It was the quietest police presence at MardiGrass in twenty years, and was there any trouble? Of course not. Thank you NSW Police.

And thank you to the many, many people who played their roles in making this year's MardiGrass a really good happy weekend. I was a trifle shocked when the local cops asked if it was to be our last MardiGrass. Not yet. When we are no longer criminals was the deal.

And to the Aquarians who planted the first seeds in Nimbin 50 years ago, I can't thank you enough. And to the locals who were here then and still are, good for you, and thank you.

Nimbin should feel good about itself as the truths the hippies have been crying out about for fifty years have all proven to be spot on.

Zine fans treat



Holly and her good friend Craig Scanlan "Banana Craig" (in wheelchair) at Print Fest. Photo: Zarek

by Holly English

Byron Bay recently held its first Print Fest, which was a huge success!

Huge shout out to Benjo for being the co-ordinator of this epic occasion. Karena Wynn-Molan is a longtime Byron Local who documented the event through her 'Narratives Library' podcast and has now put it up there for all to listen to and be inspired!

The Narratives Library is linked to the radio program Arts Canvass on Bay-FM 99.9. You can find us on Spotify under 'Narratives Library National Edition' for podcasts and on many other platforms including: *Libsyn.com*

I listened back on my previous interview on the page about my 'Dad' comic. I was a little nervous, but it was super fun listening to the interview in retrospect.... talking so candidly about my childhood and Dad, and making this comic.

Have a listen if you have time!

And thanks everyone for your on-going love and creative support.

Find us at: www.narrativeslibrary.com/zines

Anytime is a good time for weeding

by Triny Roe

Now, while the soil is still moist, is a great time. In damp ground the roots release more easily.

Take advantage of the autumn rains, which have replenished the ground water and get out on your block and do some weeding.

If you're stressed or depressed, go weeding. You will feel better. Need to get fit, go weeding. Are you bored? Go weeding. Want to protect our beautiful valleys? Go weeding.

There are lots of weeds around and lots of reasons to weed. Don't let them flower, set seed and spread even further.

Weeds are a serious threat to biodiversity (as is land clearing). And there are plenty of weeds in the Northern Rivers. The subtropical climate – not too hot, not too cold – is ideal for just about all plants to survive and thrive.

The mild weather, coupled with the fertile volcanic clay soil and plenty of rain, means little does not grow here and plenty that do exceptionally well. It's a gardener's dream or a nightmare, as some plants can go crazy.

Golden Rain trees, *Koeleruteria paniculata*, and Jacarandas, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, are stunning when in flower but they

are also invasive in the sub-tropics and can dominate the landscape if not managed.

There's a reason South Africa has banned the jacaranda. Unfortunately, in Australia, nurseries can and do still sell this tree and many other environmental weed species, such as night flowering jasmine, *Centrum nocturnum*. And because they can buy them, people still plant them.

New weeds can come via many paths. Apart from wind and water, people often inadvertently spread weeds themselves. Take care where car mats are shaken out, especially after a long road trip. Check the bottom of your thongs in bindi-eye, *Soliva sessilis* season.

Roadside 'wildflowers' – pretty as they are, are probably weeds – gathered, enjoyed for a while and later, carelessly discarded, can start a new infestation. It's nice to be a freedom-loving hippy and pick flowers found along the path to wear in your hair but those flowers can contain seed and propagation material so consider carefully where they end up.

Singapore daisy, *Sphagneticola trilobata*, a native of Central America, will readily grow from a small cutting. This plant produces allelopathic chemicals, which prevent germination of other species, so it is a serious threat to the



Tigers love Singapore Daisy. Mohan used to live at Dreamworld

Golden Rain tree can dominate.

environment.

It's in the Top 100 in the Global Invasive Species Database. Singapore daisy is a ground cover with a creeping habit. It sends out long runners, which can grow a metre a week in good conditions.

Winding its way through the native groundcovers and eventually smothering them, it puts down roots at the numerous nodes along the stem making it very difficult to hand-weed. Slashing and mowing create hundreds of new plants.

Spreading rapidly around NSW and Qld, it is common on many beaches. Hard to bring under control, there is a website dedicated to its eradication, killsingaporedaisy.org.au

Warning! Glyphosate will not effect a kill on this tenacious plant. The leaves initially brown and drop off



but it soon re-sprouts, even more vigorously because all its competitors are dead from the glyphe!

Black plastic solarisation can be used in areas that get full sun. Sometimes containment is the only option. Don't let this one spread further. Get onto new occurrences quickly before they become unmanageable.

Choose native species to plant in your garden. A range of plants will provide year-round food and shelter to birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife.

Aim for biodiversity, not simply biomass. And get on to the weeds sooner rather than later.

Happy weeding.

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AQUARIUS FESTIVAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY - ELLIS D FOGG LIGHTSHOW - 2023
BUSH THEATRE, NIMBIN - sponsored by Ellis D. Fogg, photographed by NATSKY

Classics are back at Nimbin School of Arts

After a series of popular classical music concerts at Nimbin School of Arts in 2022, the Nimbin Hills Musicians Club will be back on stage at the School of Arts on Sunday 25th June.

The concert will feature a solstice offering from classical to klezmer.

The program will include a Ravel piano duet, Gabriel Faure's The Dolly Suite, plus a selection of medieval music and more.

The concert starts at 2pm, entry is \$10 and the Hall's verandah cafe will be open after the recital.



March Flies – Bella Frankie's new single

Bella Frankie's new single 'March Flies' is a triumphant and defiant folk-rock gem and the first release off their forthcoming cathartic album 'After the Flood'.

'March Flies' is both hard-hitting and vulnerable, an uncut story of a storm-off in the duo's recording process on the remote Flinders Island in the Bass Strait.

With fierce vocals, moody cello and punchy guitar this song feels like a modern wild-west film soundtrack. Thunderstorms interspersed with sunshine, the track takes you on the Bella Frankie song journey: dramatic and irrefutably original with the soul of a storyteller.

Michael Turner of *Wild Pumpkins at Midnight*, the 1990s Tasmanian alt-rock export, has joined up with



Ajita Cannings to form *Bella Frankie*, harnessing the best bits of Australian folk music. Their sound is homely and edgy all at once.

Their first release 'Rumi' was described by Christine Anu like 'driving down a dirt road to a house full of dear friends', and by Bernard Fanning as 'a beautiful story, taking you by surprise, Class!'

Live, the pair are accompanied by

Natasha Kraemer who has more than earned her stripes in the classical music world with The Australian Haydn Ensemble, and her cello brings a fine musicality to the band as well as sophisticated three-part harmonies.

Their second album, *After the Flood* was recorded at the band's musical home in a rustic settlers cottage on Flinders Island, a tiny solar electricity system permitting recording only when the sun was out.

The album tracks a year of recovery after the devastating Lismore floods of February 2022 where they lost their home. *After the Flood* will be released in September.

This first single release, 'March Flies' is about as Aussie folk as you can get, it's a reverie to the little critters who bite us all back to reality.



Acid Bleed raising funds

Acid Bleed Jazz Group will be performing their lively toe tapping music on Sunday 11th June at the Lismore Bowling Club, 2pm to 5pm.

Acid Bleed are a five piece Gypsy Jazz ensemble who are playing this concert in aid of the Lismore Refugee Settlement Group.

Lismore Region for Refugee Resettlement Group (LRRS) is expecting their first refugee family to arrive soon. They are a mother and son from South America who will be settling in Lismore.

The LRRS Group will be responsible for providing housing, household goods and assisting the family to access services and to help ease their way into Australian society.

All are welcome to come along and to have a good time for a great cause.

Lismore Bowling Club is located at 171A Molesworth Street, between the Lismore Memorial Baths and the Lismore Fire Station.

To contact LRRS, please phone us on 0427-003-609 and leave a message.

LISAMORE! JUNE 18!

The parkland setting at the Lismore Turf Club is the new home for the popular community celebration with an Italian twist – **LisAmore!**

Formerly known as *Piazza in the Park*, the new name and the new venue will welcome locals and visitors to the city on Sunday, 18th June 10am–3pm, for a wide range of outdoor activities and familiar tastes and sounds of Italy.

Spoil yourself with an array of treats from our Italian market stalls pasta, pizza, Prosecco and delicious desserts. There will be dancing, tug-o-war and displays of Italian cars and bikes for all ages. Fifteen Ferraris will be coming down from Queensland to share their passion for the iconic vehicles.

The community has been challenged in the past few years and it is now time to party as we acknowledge the long-standing connection between Lismore and two friendship cities in northern Italy. We recognise the settlers from that area who continue to make a valuable contribution to the region's cultural diversity and heritage.

The return of this popular event is timely and will help

lift the city's spirits.

The free family fun day will see a very active Kids Space with lots to do and play, Italian language classes, the popular entertainer Domenico and his Latin Mafia Band for toe tapping good vibes, tarantella dance workshops for young and old led by Serena Joy, and fun and games led by Antonio Mazzella and his colourful characters all over the parkland.

Organisers are taking waste management seriously and are encouraging guests to explore Waste World on site to help make our big day out a sustainable adventure.

Families and friends are invited to bring their picnic sets and blankets with tables and chairs available too.

While LisAmore! Is the main focus on the Sunday, there will be a series of fun activities in the city's CBD on Saturday, 17th June.

An accordion master class, led by Domenico, at the Conservatorium will encourage the participants to get out on the streets afterwards and busk. A free Commedia del arte drama workshop for all ages will be held in Spinks Park, and John Barnes from New Italy is going to give a presentation on the descendants of New



Domenico Taraborrelli, Latin Mafia band Photo: Peter Derrett

Italy and how they survived a harrowing journey from north Italy to our region in 1880.

This year's Enchanted Windows explores The Gates of Renewal theme and in our cafés, owners will be invited to dress their stores with an Italian theme. Sponsored by the Lismore Friendship Festival and the Lismore Lantern Parade, Enchanted Windows will be window-

shopping with a twist.

It will be a dynamic week from 17th June to the must-see spectacle of the Lismore Lantern Parade on Saturday, 24th June. What a week! The city will come alive for locals and visitors enjoy the creativity for which the region is renowned.

For more details, check out our updated website: www.lismorefriendshipfestival.com.au



SeedArts proudly presents 'The Xrossing' a spectacular highwire tribute to Con Colleano, a Gamilaroi-man born in Lismore 1899, who became the greatest tightwire artist of all time.

Known as the Wizard of the Wire, his grace, style and achievements have never been paralleled.

'The Xrossing' will feature celebrated tightwire walkers performing a breathtaking show on highwires stretching 60 metres across the Lismore Quad, 110 Magellan Street.

The free daytime event on Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th July, during NAIDOC Week, includes performances by 'community walkers' on a lower wire, live music and local vendors serving up delicious food.

Free 'Wizards of the Wire' community tightwire workshops will be held from 1st to 4th July at Lismore Quad. Whether you're a fan of highwire acts or simply looking for an unforgettable experience for all the family, 'The Xrossing' will take you on a journey of amazement and wonder.

Registration and ability to commit is essential. More info at: seedartsy.com

Get ready for the Byron Writers Festival

Mark your calendar for Australia's favourite regional literary event taking place 11-13th August at its new home, Bangalow Showground and the A&I Hall.

The festival line-up, to be announced later this month, features more than 100 Australian and international writers and thinkers who together challenge, entertain and share their stories, inspirations and insights.

Famous for its relaxed vibe and incredible three-day program of inspiring conversations on the topics that matter now, it's a feast for the mind!

Key dates to note:

- 14th June – Early Bird 3-day passes on sale and first guests announced.
- 28th June – Full program announced and all tickets on sale.

For updates, visit: byronwritersfestival.com/festival or follow @byronwritersfestival