

We are a bush branch that battles to save our inland environment

We are a bush branch that gives the environment a voice and provides practical solutions to save our inland country

This is a celebration of the existence and achievements of the Upper Dawson Branch of WPSQ. A bush branch northwest of Brisbane, a five hour drive into beautiful Brigalow country. We are a group who took a stand, who were not willing to accept changes brought by people who can only see money or votes. It was paramount we put forward our point of view to preserve the beauty and integrity of our country.

We formed in 1985 after a series of serendipitous events. The meeting of mind and spirit of two individuals, a local councillor and an environmental consultant in the local hospital with a broken leg, provided the inspiration to get the conservation message further spread. An invitation to speak at a forum held at the Brigalow Development School in Dalby early 1985 keep things moving forward. An important output of this gathering was the publication of a significant collection of papers entitled, *Agriculture and Conservation in Inland Queensland*. A culminating event followed which was the calling of a public meeting to form an inland branch of WPSQ in October 1985. "The group formed for the district was very busy developing country, pasture and pushing country, we wanted to introduce a balance".

We were a small and determined group that worked our way through to the early 1990's with drought a significant feature in our lives. We were quick to establish partnerships with Landcare, Chinchilla Field Naturalists, Dalby WPSQ, Department of Transport, Queensland Conservation Council, Taroom Shire Council and National Parks. We also became involved in a diverse range of projects near and far, local level to federal. Projects with National Parks including the gazettal of the complete Expedition NP, preparing submissions for Robinson Gorge and Expedition NP management plans, recommendation that Palm Grove become national park, declaration of Thrushton and Idalia national parks, comments to discussion paper on the management of Fraser Island, to name a few.

Within our community we supported local school projects, wrote monthly articles on threatened species, presented displays at the local show, donated Wild Life magazine

subscriptions to libraries and schools. We also offered advice to locals re land management. "We do make our presence felt constructively in the community." At the state and federal level we have had input into issues like the management of camping and watering reserves and stock routes, Drought Policy for Queensland Conservation Council, protection of ooline scrub, vegetation clearing legislation, commercial harvesting of kangaroos, research into environmental flows, protection of bilbies, land degradation policy, and management of feral cats; I'm out of breath. We placed great importance with being committee members on industry and agriculture boards which allowed us direct access to people. "Our belief is to sow seeds and build relationships".

During the mid to late 1990's the group grew in number and continued to strike a balance between necessary book work, the organisation of events and letter writing with popular outings with the spirit, "We have a strong role to play in the life of our community." An example of an event was the convening of a long weekend seminar with prominent speakers that attracted a large number of people and promoted the environmental and social issues in relation to the proposed Nathan Dam. 1997 saw the formation of the Taroom Coalition to oppose the Nathan Dam. This coalition included the United Graziers Association, Grain Growers Association, affected landholders and WPSQ. We worked together on shared issues such as the listing of boggomosses on the Register of the National Estate and demonstrated how effectively we worked together.

During this time emphasis was being placed on water issues with the development of a culture demanding water for irrigation. This was a most decisive period for us with our opposition to the Nathan Dam. We reaffirmed what it was that we wanted to achieve; "A community based organisation committed to an ecologically sustainable future for people and native wildlife through advocacy and action." The research on the boggomosses had been completed and we realised that a large number of these communities would be inundated, as well, the riparian corridor would be flooded, lost; "We had to oppose the dam". This created dissent for the Taroom and Banana Shires, the people down stream and the local state member were all strongly in support of the Dam. The dam represented an opportunity for economic development. This is a recurring theme when aspiring to balance sensible and practical conservation with people's immediate wants and narrow perceptions. In plain and simple language long term good was being lost because of short term views and

thinking. We made our decision to “stand up and be counted” and this resulted in us disagreeing strongly with those in power. This split the community and we lost some of our members. The high court decision blocking the dam at the time vindicated our stand. The Nathan Dam proposal has resurfaced, now with the proposition of sending the impounded water south to service coal mines. This Dawson water will eventually be transferred into the Murray Darling watershed. We are still strongly opposing this proposition.

We see the importance of the flow of ideas, providing practical solutions to problems and keeping urban members up to date on inland issues by putting forward the inland point of view, another point of view to the coastal one. We are bonded by a common interest in learning more about our local environment and achieving its healthy existence in perpetuity. Building relationships is important to use. The nature of our correspondence is positive, constructive and proactive, driving towards improvements. The nature of our interactions is how to turn weakness and threats into strengths and opportunities together.

The arrival of the 2000s did not offer any respite for us with management of feral horses on national parks (a very emotive issue), energy generation, railway line, coal mines, fire management, water management, grazing in national parks, gas fields, pipe lines, high voltage line and Nathan Dam to contribute to. Our branch realised early on that coal seam gas (CSG) water would create problems for the environment as well as for landholders. This early exposure to the CSG industry prompted us to pressure the state government to put in place sensible controls so that the environment would not be damaged. Unfortunately this was not done and we have seen a series of laws and plans that have reacted to problems as opposed to designing a better future. These are the biggest development proposals for the Upper Dawson since the large scale scrub-pulling and pasture development of the 1950’s and 1960’s. The intent of development then was to increase the food producing capacity of the area, whereas these new proposals of today will restrict our valley’s ability to produce food and fibre for a hungry world.

The branch has been and still is heavily involved in writing submissions to EISs and talking to government departments and proponents who endeavour to get sensible environmental outcomes for the valley. “It will be up to all of us as responsible citizens to make sure that we get the maximum benefit possible with the minimum long term disturbance to our social

structure and environment. We must be very conscious of the fact that our decisions and actions of today must not be taken for short term gain as this will adversely affect our children and grandchildren when it's their turn to co-manage our country."

Our group can be commended for we have achieved, achieved on-the-ground results. Results such as the increase of national park area with the official gazettal of Flagstaff in Isla Gorge NP and Expedition NP, protection of two patches of ooline scrub in the Upper Dawson catchment Glenleigh and Stones Corner Ooline Reserves, improved management of kangaroos, protection of road side remnant vegetation, protection and repair of Flagstaff Road a hand paved road, instigation of research into the management of mother of millions, boggamoss and riverine habitat which found an amazingly diverse and unique plants and animals resulting in the fencing of boggomoss to exclude stock, mapping of remanent road side vegetation, construction of visitor facilities at Lake Murphy to commemorate Leichhardt's travels through the area.

The Upper Dawson branch will continue with the conviction that, "There has got to be a voice for the environment, a practical voice."