

ORIGINAL COMMISSIONER'S TRUST:

**BACKLASH BUILDS
AGAINST GREENS OVER TUGUN BY**

OP Grand
EXHIBIT No. 114
CLERK

By Bob Janssen

Our City's infrastructure suffered a massive blow with the loss of the Tugun bypass project due to environmental issues. The Western Chambers of Commerce say that the Tugun bypass should have gone ahead and that some environmentalists have gone too far.

Environmental protection is a contentious issue that makes politicians nervous, can send investors and developers broke and is highly emotive often resulting in a status quo situation by doing nothing. The cost of this to our city in deference to the greens is too great. So, we may well ask, how and why was this allowed to happen?

Indiscriminate and inappropriate development in the past created the conditions that formed groups seeking a balance between the needs of the community and our ecology. Whether these be community, progress, preservation or heritage associations, collectively they have had a major influence on the planning and structure of our city. None have had a greater influence than those we simply call "the greens".

Commitment, passion and organization of the green movement, coupled with their ability to foster and harness the public conscience has led to a greater awareness of the responsibility we have in protecting the environment for ourselves and for future generations. Global recognition for environmental protection cumulated in the United Nations Rio Convention (1996) resulting in resolutions to which the Commonwealth of Australia became a signatory. Many of these resolutions form the basis of our Integrated Planning Act.

Two important aspects of the Rio Convention are that in defining the environment, it included the community and ecology as part of the whole and that these components were indivisible, it also recognized the need and right to develop. It is in these two tenets that division and controversy rise within the community.

What constitutes environmental protection, what is an equitable balance and is that balance currently being served? There are many, including conservative greens, who would say it is not, that fundamentalist and extremist philosophies exist at both ends of the spectrum and neither are desirable or productive. A rebalancing of the scales is long overdue.

Environmental protection is written into our laws, it is a responsibility we must all accept and embrace, but we must remember that the environment is inclusive of the community residing within it. Those who seek to divide or separate community and environment and still claim to be environmental protectionists are misdirecting themselves and have simply lost the plot.

The pier organization representing environmental issues within our city is GECKO, a body that has much to be proud of. Recycling at our city's landfill is contracted by GECKO resulting in energy saving and extension of landfill lifetime. The work that GECKO does is highly commendable and their constant reminder of our environmental responsibilities stimulates our conscience.

There is however another side to this organization, a highly efficient and professional political wing that walks the halls of power and influences our political decision makers. The announcement that the N.S.W government was backing out of the Tugun bypass project would suggest that this influence has had a detrimental effect on our community.

Conspiracy theories as to why the N.S.W. government came to it's decision will abound for years to come, whatever the reason, it does not change the fact that the political wing of GECKO lobbied long and hard against the Tugun bypass on environmental grounds. Despite their reluctance to do so, GECKO must take a fair proportion of the responsibility for the outcome.

Consider the \$17 million of your taxpayers money wasted, and the yet unresolved problem of a critical part of our roadworks infrastructure growing worse on a daily basis. The cost to our community in money, time, potential road rage and yes, even air pollution, is too high a price to pay against the possibilities of fauna relocation together with breeding and horticultural programmes which have been successfully implemented elsewhere on the globe. Is it a matter of priorities, do we simply say no to development or search out realistic and achievable solutions that impart equitable outcomes to the community and the ecology?

To understand the full impact of how GECKO has influenced the outcome of projects in this city we need to be aware of the history.

- Naturelink: cableway to Springbrook, tourist attraction, local employment. LOST
- Ecotrans: cableway to Mt Tamborine creating 100 jobs and 2 million a year for environmental protection. LOST
- Harbour Study: part of this study included a proposal to lease and develop world class tourism accommodation on the Southport Spit and generate an additional 20 hectares of public open space. Surplus capital was to be used to keep open navigable channels, clean up and maintain the Spit, Wavebreak Island and fund critical roadworks infrastructure. LOST

Council has in recent years expended tens of thousands of dollars in defending frivolous appeals against development proposals that have been subsequently dismissed by the Planning and Environment Court.

On each occasion these appeals (ranging from eco cabins in the Hinterland to urban development in areas that have been designated for such development for 30 years) have shown that Council's decisions were correct.

This is a gross waste of resources, your ratepayers money, and needs to be dealt with.

Gecko has access to considerable Federal, State and Council funding which again comes from our taxes. There is no argument that environmental groups are necessary to monitor and safeguard our environment and that they require funding, but the perception that this funding may be used to disrupt or block development on philosophical rather than environmental grounds needs to be investigated.

The cost to the community and to individuals is more than the bottom line of an accountant's financial report. The infrastructure of our city effecting growth, services and safety, the loss of employment opportunities and the emotional and fiscal strain of those who are caught up in this tug of war between philosophies and reality must also be factored in.

The growing perception in our community that it has all gone too far, is followed by a question that began with a whisper and has increased in intensity. "When will we find a balance?" The toughest question of all is, are the politicians prepared to listen, to stand up and be counted and are the greens prepared to recognize the rights and needs of the community within the environment? The time for rhetoric and politically correct double talk containing little substance is falling on deaf ears and should go the way of the dinosaur.

Procreation and emigration are a natural part of our survival instinct as a species, with it comes expansion and development, to deny that, denies reality, our very existence and heritage. We must all come to terms of how we develop the natural environment but this should not translate into the exclusion of development altogether.

It is time we all took a long hard look at where we are, where we intend to be in 20 or more years time and how we are going to get there before we, you and I, are considered to be in need of recognition as an endangered species.