

Notes for March Australia, Sunday 31 August 2014

North Queensland Conservation Council has been working in and with the community, as an apolitical body, to protect the environment in the north since 1974 – and I think I am on firm ground when I say that the job has never been harder.

There have been tough issues in the past – stopping Ben Lomond the first time around comes to mind, the fights to improve vegetation protection laws, to get the GBR listed and to try to stop the Nelly Bay development. But never has the flood of attacks on the environment been more widespread, intense and ideologically driven.

Every week a new Bill, Act, Policy or decision is announced by a government that values nothing above the economy, and within that economy, nothing above the resources sector.

It was a US Senator, Gaylord Nelson, who gave us the saying: **'The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around'**.

Anyone stopping to think about that for just a moment would appreciate the truth in it – without a healthy environment there is no functioning society and there is no strong economy.

But, unfortunately, our current leaders choose not to get it.

And while the Federal government's atrocious decision in relation to Abbot Point, a decision that NQCC is challenging in the AAT, has gained huge publicity, it is just one of many, many bad environmental decisions.

For example, as many will have read, the Federal government recently approved the Carmichael mine proposal in the Galilee Basin. On Friday the state gave their approval.

- **28,000 ha – over 5 times MI – 45 km long**
- **297 billion litres water - 12.5 billion per year**
- **4 x carbon emissions of NZ and the same as the planned reduction associated with 'Direct Action'**
- **Water table dropping by 20-50 metres beyond the mine boundary (300 m within the boundary and 4 m near the Carmichael River) and anticipated land subsidence**
- **310 km rail – 14 return trips daily of 4 km train**
- **25 pp conditions, inc requirements to 'undertake a peer review of the adequacy of the current groundwater flow model'; to submit a plan that investigates, identifies and evaluates methods to prevent, mitigate and remediate ecological impacts on species dependent on the GAB; and to undertake baseline research for the Black Throated Finch.**

But beyond the scores of individual development approvals such as Abbot Point and Carmichael, the attack on the environment has been systematic and fundamental. Over the last year this government has:

1. Failed to appoint a Minister for Science
2. Failed to appoint a Minister for Climate Change
3. Abolished the Climate Commission
4. Set up a report that will facilitate demolition of the Renewable Energy Target
5. Handed over decision-making power on MNES to the States
6. Abolished the price on carbon
7. Attempted to de-list 74,000 ha of WH protected forest in Tasmania
8. Continued subsidising the fossil fuel industries
9. Relied on the widely discredited and still not designed Direct Action Plan to address carbon emissions
10. Drastically weakened the network of Marine Protected Areas
11. Withdrawn funding from the Environmental Defenders Offices – the lawyers dedicated to protecting the environment
12. Ended Federal grants for voluntary environment groups
13. Abolished the Water Commission
14. Announced that 'too much' forest is 'locked up' in National Parks, setting the stage for commercialisation of NPs
15. 'Opened up' the Galilee basin by approving Clive Palmer's China First coal mine, Gina Rinehart's Kevin's Corner mine and Adani's Carmichael mine – together looking to mine over 150 Mtpa. All of these approvals were given prior to the completion of required environmental studies.
16. Cut funds for Reef Rescue
17. Abolished the Biodiversity Fund
18. Cut funds for Landcare by almost half a billion dollars over 5 years.
19. Removed the rights of landholders to refuse coal & CSG on their land
20. Cut funding for CSIRO, AIMS and GBRMPA
21. Gutted the DoE
22. Announced a plan to sell uranium to India – a non-signatory to the Nuclear Weapons Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The impacts of this environmental vandalism will last for generations and impoverish Australia environmentally, socially and economically. A building can be rebuilt, a law repealed; but a forest, an aquifer and reef once destroyed is destroyed for a very long time – quite possibly forever.

We are witnessing deliberate destruction – ruthless sabotage at the highest level. It is a disaster; it is a tragedy; it is a crime.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE NATION, IT HAS TO STOP.