

# The launch of Catchment Action Plan 2 (CAP2)

I became involved in the latter stages of the development of Cap 2 when I was drafted into the Catchment Management Authority's (CMA) CAP 2 Working Group in late 2012 to represent the North Coast Environment Council.

CAP 2 follows on from CAP 1, which saw many exciting, much-needed environmentally beneficial projects brought to conclusion through funding from various government sources, and distributed by the CMA.

Over the years the CMA has grown in stature and has become recognised by many conservationists as a real force in addressing environmental problems at a catchment level, so it was with a positive feeling that I embarked on this new venture.

However, from the beginning I realised that the CAP2 focus, under directions from the State government, was significantly different to its predecessor, in that the previous aim of ecological sustainability had been changed to a focus on 'socio-ecological' outcomes.

Under this new format the three Ls - landscape, livelihoods, lifestyles - feature equally, with the CMA responsible for ensuring biological, social and industrial sustainability across rural NSW.

From a personal viewpoint I could see a number of conflicting objectives, a typical example being that the CMA was now tasked with ensuring the sustainability of the timber industry, which has long (and loudly) proclaimed that their only solution is to unlock national parks to logging, while also being responsible for sustaining biodiversity values across the region.

Nevertheless, the CMA CAP2 team compiled an excellent document that has received praise from many quarters. From my environmental viewpoint, I expressed concerns about a lack of any firm plans for action, and it was explained to me that the document was meant to be purely 'conceptual'. I could see some wisdom in this because, at that point in time, the government had not provided the CMA with any budget to work with. However, the team has undertaken an excellent analysis of the threats facing the environment of the Northern Rivers Region and stressed the need for action to address those threats.

But then, just weeks before finalising the Plan, the O'Farrell juggernaut struck. The CMA was dumped, 41% of its staff were sacked, and a new entity, known as Local Land Services (LLS) was born, combining the CMA with the Livestock Health and Pest Authority and service elements of the Department of Agriculture. Essentially I fear this will result in the unwinding of 25 years of enlightened environmental catchment management and a return to the Land and Water Conservation Department.



**Gathering for the CAP2 launch at the Thompson Property, Upper Orara**

The CAP2 launch was held on the last day of May in the picturesque surroundings of a farm at Upper Orara, where a gathering of some 60 to 70 attendees were honoured by the presence of the Minister for Primary Industry, Katrina Hodgkinson who was to do the honours, and local State member Andrew Frazer.



**Indigenous dancers entertain the guests**

An excellent morning tea with home-made finger food set the mood, and with the VIPs predictably late, the crowd was entertained by the Orara High School's indigenous dance troop.



The welcome to country by a local Aboriginal elder from the Gumbainggirr nation included an interesting explanation of how indigenous peoples honoured the land, followed by the welcome delivered in the traditional language.

The Welcome was almost completed when Ms Hodgkinson and Mr Frazer finally arrived. The former took the stand and spent much of her 10 minute speech detailing how much funding had been allocated to the new LLS, but was highly complimentary of the CAP, describing it as an outstanding document that other CMAs would envy.

I suppose the audience would have been more impressed had the Minister stayed to listen to other speakers, including inspirational segments by local farmer and Orara Rivercare member, Ron Smith, and the property owner, Steve Thompson. Instead, she and Mr Frazer removed themselves to speak to the waiting media teams. Finally, with speeches still in progress, the VIP party departed without even a farewell word.

Unfortunately my previous impressions of the minister, formed as a consequence of her failure to respond to community concerns over illegal logging activity by Forests NSW, the agency she controls; by her illogical winding back of marine protection; by her closure of the Cronulla Centre of Excellence for Marine Research, and by her apparent desire to see logging and grazing activities extended into national parks, has been reinforced by her actions on the day.



**The Hon Katrina Hodgkinson**



**Rod McKelvie, CMA Board member**

Ron Smith, who has spent a lifetime in the Upper Orara area, spoke of the forming of Orara Rivercare more than a decade ago and how the removal of Camphor Laurel trees and other weeds along the river bank was seeing the return of the natural rainforest habitat that he remembered from his early childhood.

Steve Thompson, the owner of the property where the launch was held, is a relative newcomer, but dedicated to ensuring that he passes on a sustainable farming enterprise with improved ecological values. The sight of a fenced off drainage line near the property entrance, with freshly planted native trees, is something that is rarely seen in rural Australia, and testament to his dedication.

The launch closed with a wrap of the CAP2 by the CMA Board member, Rod McKelvie, followed by two highly informative 30 minute tours of the farm and the Orara Rivercare project along the river bank.

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