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Report to the Annual General Meeting of The Big Scrub Environment Centre Inc. 25 August '98

1. As an employee of The Big Scrub Environment Centre this report is provided to inform members about my activities and last year's progress in the campaign to protect the high conservation value forests of North East NSW.
2. The Centre has hosted my employment as 'regional forest co-ordinator' during the last twelve months. In March '97, I was employed for 5 months full-time work, with the Centre receiving a subsidy to assist in paying my wages. From mid August last year, I was employed for three days a week; and since the end of March this year I have had two days a week paid employment at the Centre. At this stage it is anticipated that I will continue to be employed on the forests campaign for two days a week until end of November this year.
3. My employment has been made possible through a grant to the Centre of \$28,000 from the Nature Conservation Council of NSW. This grant, for which I wrote the submission, is part of an overall sum of \$150,000 paid to NCC by the NSW Government to facilitate conservation groups participation in the Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) of forests. Apart from my part-time employment, our region's grant includes: office rent, phone and fax charges, travel costs, photocopying, campaign materials design & production.
4. My work as regional forest co-ordinator has largely involved ongoing liaison with other campaigners and members of the public involved in seeking increased forest protection. In particular, I've been in touch with groups such as Byron EC, Caldera EC in the Tweed, Pikapene and Cherry Tree EC (near Mallanganee), Clarence EC in Grafton, FROGS (Goonengerry) and Armidale based environment groups. Much of this liaison has involved keeping people informed of the latest developments within governments, our campaign objectives, seeking information and comment, forwarding documents for review, issuing notice of and invitations to meetings or workshops and referring inquiries to relevant people. I've also been involved in meetings, discussions and decisions with Dailan Pugh and other forest co-ordinators based in the lower north east region and in Sydney. Lobbying MP's, Ministers, their advisers and senior government officials and acting as the regional spokesperson for the forest campaign via media releases, interviews for radio, TV and newspapers has also been part of my work. I've also assisted the members of the Northern Rivers Harvesting Advisory Board, with advice and suggestions where I have been able to do so. All this has required an endless round of meetings, phone calls, teleconferences, drafting and editing of documents, dispatch and receipt of faxes and Email.
5. The CRA has also required my participation in meetings of two special advisory bodies.
 - With Georgia Beyer and Jess Bowden, I have attended meetings of the Upper North East Regional Forest Forum (UNE RFF) as a conservation representative. The RFF involves almost all the interest groups in the region, so we three conservation reps are hugely outnumbered. While the RFF has reached consensus on several occasions, these meetings have been very tense and difficult at times.

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As conservation reps we have very different views to other groups on the RFF, and on many occasions we have had to challenge the 'myths' espoused as 'fact' by other reps as a basis for their positions. Though strategically important, this 'dialogue' has been very draining.

- With Mark Blecher from the SE Forest Conservation Council (based in Bega) I have been travelling to Canberra and Sydney to attend Economic and Social Technical Committee meetings. As part of my role at the ESTC I have sought improvements to draft economic and social research projects for the NE regions and have developed several proposals for ESTC approval, notably a study of the non-use values of the forests of the regions' forests. These ESTC meetings have also been very difficult, due to the attitudes of the reps from Commonwealth agencies, the industry and the CFMEU. While the outputs of the social and economic projects may be less useful than we'd hoped, the industry's ability to abort these projects has been limited by Mark's and my participation. These trips away have been rather dislocating and personally taxing.
6. Though I've had a limited involvement in its production, I am pleased to advise that considerable progress has been made in developing an information campaign to take the forest conservation message to the general public. Georgia Beyer and De Grebner have been central to this campaign and where possible I have assisted them in preparing form letters, leaflets, displays and slide talks. They have also organized the production of stickers, posters and T-shirts to communicate our key messages. De is now taking this material out to the public at market stalls and information meetings. It's planned that this public campaign will build over the next two months as the time for decisions by government draw closer. Many thanks are due to both De and Georgia for their efforts.
 7. A central objective of our strategy has been to obtain a firm commitment from NSW Government that the NE regional forest assessments would be done by the end of 1998. That goal was realised early this month when it was announced that the NSW Government has set dates for negotiations for both the Upper North East region (from Coffs Harbour north) and the Lower North East region (from Coffs to the Central Coast). A week of talks over the UNE forest will begin in Sydney on 14 September, with the LNE the subject of further week of negotiations starting on 21 September.
 8. These negotiations signal the commencement of the next and most crucial phases of the forest assessment: the identification of areas required for a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative forest reserve system and those forests needed for future timber production. This phase will be quickly followed by a period of public exhibition and comment, during which our public campaign must be prominent. An overtly political phase will then commence, during which the NSW Government must make critical decisions on future forest use and pass legislation to give effect to its decisions. During these next phases: negotiations, exhibition and political decisions; I've been asked to be involved in media and actions co-ordination, lobbying and negotiating. This means I will have to spend considerably more time in Sydney during September, October and November, and consequently less time at The Big Scrub Environment Centre. (But it'll all be over by Xmas!)
 9. Before the negotiations begin however, the Centre will host next weekend (29 & 30 Aug) a workshop on designing the Regional Forest Reserve System for the Upper North East region of NSW. The workshop will allow interested people to: acquaint themselves with the numerous layers of natural resources data; be involved in demonstrations and hands on operation of the computer mounted Geographic Information System (GIS) and; identify and nominate forest areas of interest and concern. If you're interested in attending please let me know!

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10. One other matter to report is my activity as executive producer of '*Forest Voices*', a monthly half-hour news and current affairs radio program distributed to 14 community FM radio stations on the north coast, in Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Last August I applied on The Centre's behalf to the Commonwealth Government and we received a \$5,000 special 'Participation and Awareness' grant to produce a series of radio programs to inform members of the public about the CRA process and our interests and concerns. Nearly 12 months later 8 programs have been produced in association with 2NCR-FM and a network of environment shows on north coast community FM stations has been compiled. Thanks are due to Southern Cross media students Andrew Kilvert, who produced two programs, and Lisa Flynn who produced one program and is preparing FV 9 now. Special thanks are due to technical producer Greg Sparks for his expertise, program host David Scholtz, news readers Melinda Saxe and Jeremy Fenton, interviewer Marg Alexander, 2NCR-FM managers Andrew Nicolson and Kate Benecke, info services staffer Joe Testa, and colourists Karl & Kayla.
11. Outside of my paid work, I have acted as a delegate of the Centre attending all of the North Coast Environment Council Inc meetings in the last year. I became one of NCECs Vice-Presidents earlier this year (when Martin Frolich moved to Newcastle) and took on the role of NCEC delegate to the Northern Rivers Economic Development Organisation (NORED0) soon after. As the northern VP I inherited responsibility for convening meetings of the Northern Rivers sub-committee of the Council. These bio-regional meetings of NCEC's member groups, held in the Centre's premises, focus on environmental issues of particular relevance locally in the northern rivers, and alternate with meetings of the full Council. Please come to the next one here, on Saturday 10 October.
12. For the sake of completeness, I should report that I've also been busy on coastal issues. As well as making a submission on the Centre's behalf to the Commission of Inquiry into Batson's Quarry at Broken Head in Byron Shire, I've continued my involvement as the NCC's rep on the Coastal Committee of NSW, the advisory committee to the Minister for UAP. This body has carriage of the implementation and further review of the NSW Coastal Policy 1997, finally released late last year. Further, I was actively involved in drafting and lobbying for amendments ultimately contained in the Coastal Protection (Amendment) Act 1998. As the NCC rep, I also sat on the grant assessment panels for both the CoastCare and Coasts & Cleans Seas Programs, divvying millions of dollars!
13. On a more general note - In my view, the relocation of the office premises into the back of the shop has been hugely successful, providing a street level accessibility which the stairs at the Magellan St premises prohibited. I believe that the 'shop' and the 'env centre' have both benefited from this decision to again co-locate. Many of our information clients stop and shop (or think about it) and the some of the shop's customers stumble on the displays and the library in delight! Well done the brave and wise Management Committee that made the hard decision, and got it right!
14. In conclusion, may I observe that the Centre still has unrealised potential! There is still much that could be done if there were committed people willing to take on tasks! One immediate need is to fill the roster for day co-ordinators to fly the main desk. This is a key, multi-skill role which offers heaps of challenges, but the advantage of being able to knock off at the end of the day - with nothing to take home to do! And of course then there's fundraising and the potential for environmental education activities to be organized!
15. Finally, I wish to thank the Centre's Management Committee for their support and particularly Stephen Duthy and Steve Cook for their everyday assistance on a thousand small details!

Respectfully submitted

