2006 Outgoing President's Report

It’s almost customary to begin these reports with the words: “This has been another quiet year for FMR.” I don’t want to break with tradition so here it is again: “2005-2006 has been another quiet year for FMR” or should that be quiet-ish? I have a vision and here it is swimming towards me, spines glinting, a grant application trailing from its mouth. Yes folks for the last couple of months we’ve in the lurch? towards the Macquarie Perch! (More on that later.)

And before I go on, I’d like to remember here Ailsa Korten. Ailsa had been actively involved with FMR after she moved permanently to Mongarlowe. She was a hugely helpful and efficient secretary and kept up her typing, printing and emailing of the minutes even with motor neurone disease. She was part of the running of FMR up until a few weeks of her death and we certainly miss her presence.

So to the business of the year. In November FMR put a submission in to the draft standard LEP template. The template has now been gazetted and it would appear to fail to address conservation values adequately. This is not good news for planning locally. Statewide, the Minister seems chiefly concerned to make the approval process easier for developers. Without proper guidance for rural residential zones, for example, we could well end up with large and inappropriate subdivisions in the wrong place.

On a mellower note, our Christmas meeting, as is now traditional, was held in Monga Forest this time at the Dasyurus Picnic area. From there we set off up the new link walk to the Corn Trail. It’s an excellent walk through an interesting mixture of vegetation types and the views from the Corn Trail itself were, er, memorable for anyone prepared to use their imagination. If there had been views they would have been spectacular. After a few glasses of local Mongarlowe wine everything looked spectacular, even the picnic table.

Moving on now to New Year’s Eve when something happened which was to send ripples through not only FMR but the whole world. This story, by the way is almost certainly apocryphal. Two of our members were out on a boat on the Mongarlowe River. Perhaps they weren’t in a boat but only thought they were, it was New Year’s Eve after all. Anyway they found, floating down the river, a large dead fish. Big? It was *this*big. Spiny, mysterious looking with jutting brow and two funny little misshapen arms. (On second thoughts, forget the arms.) What kind of fish was this? They took a photo but it turned out later the camera wasn’t working. (I could have told them using a toilet roll and clicking your tongue is a poor substitute.) The other witness who was either in the boat or, for all I know walking on water, only had one eye and couldn’t quite get a bead on the fish which in all its rotting glory had meanwhile been thrown back in the river, never to be seen again. Was this the last Macquarie Perch (Macquaria inebriata) ever to be seen? Its return to the river led to a terrible gnashing of teeth and wailing amongst the cognoscenti who would have preferred it deep frozen for a spot of genetic testing. Prior to being eaten by Paul Dann. The point of this shaggy fish story is? We have been offered an omen, a floating totem, a pointer, a local leviathan, a mascot! And this mascot has given FMR a new lease of life. What would otherwise have been a quiet year has turned into the great wash of a grant application.

Enter Su Wild-River, who together with her partner Paul, joined us round about this time. Su has indeed lived up to her name and stirred the somnolent waters with her brilliant idea to apply for a grant from the Threatened Species Network in order to ascertain numbers of Mac Perch in our river and how we might better protect their riparian habitat. Su put a huge amount of work into contacting people and getting the thing off the ground. Fortunately, everyone she spoke to was very interested in the project which spurred her on. Finally when she was about to give birth, she handed the application (which had grown like topsy) to Gail Nichols. And Gail it was who acted as chief midwife to the final version, putting in many hours of work and a few late nights in order to present the budget in a form acceptable to the authorities. Many thanks Su and Gail. Anyway, Su gave birth to Tully who is not a fish and Gail gave birth to Grant who we hope *will* be a fish.

We applied for $11,400 in grant funds and are fortunate to have secured the involvement of a Mac Perch expert, Mark Lintermans. We should be hearing fairly soon as to whether or not we’ve been successful. If for some unaccountable reason we’re not, I shall personally go and find the remains of that mythical New Year’s Eve fish and take it down to the Threatened Species network! No, seriously, we shall still get our project up and running one way or the other. We’ve made many useful contacts who I’m sure would be prepared to help.

And that almost brings me to the end of this report. Before I wind up I do have one more important thing to do, something that gives me great pleasure. I now confer, if that’s the right word, life membership of FMR on Solvig. Solvig has been a part of this group longer than anyone else here. She was a founder member and has been one of our most loyal supporters. Thank you so much, Solvig and I hereby appoint you Grand Dame of the Mongarlowe River with Clasp.

On that note, I’d also like to thank Di, our treasurer: Gail, our secretary and Sandra our public officer who, as always, has provided her warm and sunny house for our meetings *and*refreshments. And cream.

Finally! It’s time for me to show my hand. It’s time for me to take a long hard look at myself – and say to you this is my last report as President of FMR. I shall shortly be standing down. It has been my pleasure and privilege to serve as your figurehead. Ever since Peter Herbst put his hand on my shoulder on the slopes of Monga Mountain and told me tales of activist David versus State Forests Goliath, I knew destiny had found me. I knew one day I’d be standing in front of a bulldozer, I knew I’d be eating Sandra’s Easter buns – with cream. In short, I knew I’d be your leader. Yes, the time has come to step down but fortunately a small Latin American country has offered me the honorary position of El Presidente so I’d be obliged if you’d keep calling me that, thank you.

Seriously, I’ve had a wonderful time doing it and I doubt if I’ll be president of anything ever again.

Harry Laing