



Conservation Council SA

Subject:

**PRESIDENT & CE REPORT TO MEMBERS: YEAR IN
REVIEW**

Agenda Item: 5.1

Meeting Date: 18 Nov 2021

From Mark Anderson, President:

There are years where we have a following breeze and everything goes to plan and then there are years when for various reasons the odds just seem to be against us. Last year was both.

By July 2020 most everyone had realised that Covid was going to be more than a blip on our collective radar. The ship was potentially sinking (or at least thinking about sinking) and we had to quickly address an ever-rising tide of new rules, regulations and challenges.

It was the analysis, flexibility and quick action of CCSA staff and management that became central to seeing us come through with minimal financial bruising. Jobkeeper certainly helped...but luckily we always had the option of digging into our growing reserves if the crunch came.

But there were other losses we had to face that could not be so effectively staunched. Covid saw direct actions cancelled, public forums unable to be held and all manner of important meetings and gatherings moved from rooms to zooms.

Significantly we also faced a media that became completely obsessed with amateur immunology, messages from State premiers (largely never heard of before) and the erratic ramblings of conspiracy theorists the world over. There seemed little space for the environment to find a voice.

Climate related disasters and emergencies, however, did not abate and in fact may have remained one of the few news stories that managed to cut through the covid calamity. Bushfires and wild weather focussed many. The unholy scrambling by our federal government to try and stop the Barrier Reef losing WH status, and of course the initial reports of GHG production dropping as polluting components of our economies slowed.

Unfortunately, despite initial hopeful reports, including an awesome 48% reduction in the air traffic sector, it seems we are now almost back where we were the same time in 2019.

There have however been a number of Covid related changes that may help the next few years be different in a good way from an environmental perspective.

We now know when it comes to a crisis, economies can be made to work for us - not the other way around. We have experienced the fact that having a deficit does not mean the end of civilisation. The Growth and Jobs mantra can be turned around if we need to. How long will our memory last?

Politicians have also learnt to defer to scientists and trained experts when it comes to assessing and responding to complex threats. In some crises spin is not enough. This is a skill they hopefully will develop further and apply to decisions around the fossil fuel industry.

The US has come back to the climate conversation and it seems that Australia's long term intransigence is being seriously questioned by our allies and trading partners. Everyone seems to have a phase out deadline for fossil fuelled cars – except here where we are trying to find ways to reduce the take up of electric vehicles through higher taxes.

So – goodbye 20/21 – hello to a new year with some new potential it seems. We are as well prepared as we ever and hopefully have learnt a few things along the way...if nothing else how to use zoom.

On behalf of the Council I would like to thank our staff for their hard work and dedication. Our member groups for their continuing commitment to CCSA and being the essential component in our work as a Peak Body. Thank you to our volunteers and particularly hard working committee members and councillors. And of course, thanks to our financial supporters and donors. As we realise the importance of our ability to remain independent the support of our donors becomes a political and strategic imperative as never before.

From Craig Wilkins, Chief Executive:

2021 marks the 50th Anniversary of the Conservation Council of SA. This important milestone is a great time to stop and reflect on how much we have achieved over the last fifty years, and how much more we need to do.

It would be lovely to think our role will one day become redundant. However, if this year is anything to go by, a leading voice for nature, sustainability and climate protection in our state is needed now more than ever.

Our new three-year Strategic Plan – adopted formally at the 2020 AGM – is helping us to prioritise the many demands on our time and resources. A key direction is to increase our financial strength and independence, and this year we are delighted to bring a specialist fundraiser into our team.

COVID-19 has been financially challenging – affecting in particular our booking revenue through the Joinery. Fortunately, state and federal government support has helped significantly.

As a peak body we have again made representations on behalf of our members in response to a range of proposed changes to state and federal legislation and regulations, particularly the SA Associations and Electoral Acts, ACNC oversight on charities, and the Federal EPBC Act.

And we have once again celebrated our state's nature champions through the well-loved Annual Environment Awards. This year we returned the awards to the Joinery after COVID prevented them going ahead in 2019. As well as inducting 5 more elders and pioneers as Lifetime Achievers, our Young Achiever Award was officially re-named the Leif Justham Memorial Young Achievers Award in honour of a very special young man who died tragically at the start of 2022 while raising awareness of the importance of climate action.

Our five focus areas of action continue to prioritise our work: Climate Action, Energy Transition, Protecting Nature, Healthy Rivers and Living Sustainably.

Climate Action is central to all we do. Our Climate Change Sub Committee has developed a Climate Emergency Action Plan with a particular focus on walking the talk through our own operations.

We continue to host a huge range of climate related events, talks and meetings, including the school climate strikers. A major campaign focus continues to be the protection of mature trees in Adelaide. While there are enormous biodiversity, water retention and aesthetic reasons for looking after our big trees, arguably the most important is the role that tree canopy plays in keeping our cities cool. Our work on regulated and significant trees, as well as other climate preparation has led our response to the state's deeply disappointing planning reforms.

Essential to Climate Action is our Energy Transition. We have worked with member groups on a range of campaigns to protect the Simpson Desert, push for gas to be removed from new housing developments and to ban the use of Underground Coal Gasification. And we continue to stand with Barngarla Traditional Owners and local farmers as they fight to stop the federal government's short-sighted, unsafe and costly plan to temporarily store Australia's most dangerous radioactive waste in above ground sheds near Kimba in the state's Eyre Peninsula.

While we continue to do a huge amount of activity to Protect Nature, including our ongoing support for the SA Nature Alliance, our partnership on the Revitalising Private Conservation in SA program, providing leadership on the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, responding to development of the State Landscape Strategy and the ongoing Landscape reforms, supporting the wonderful community-led Nature Festival and the push for Adelaide to become a National Park City, three areas in particular stand out.

A major focus this year has been responding to the devastating poisoning of the St Kilda Mangroves. Through the creation of the St Kilda Mangroves Alliance, and raising attention through reports, lobbying, advocacy and media we have continued to put pressure on the Government to fix the damage and enable the recovery to begin. Unfortunately there remains a long way to go.

The Government's proposed changes to the Pastoral & Conservation Act are also deeply troubling, and we have been working over the last year with a wide range of groups and individuals to highlight concerns directly to the government, other decision makers and through the media.

And protection of our beautiful marine environment is always a priority. This year we have advocated for greater protection of the Giant Australian Cuttlefish at Pt Lowly and for Southern Right Whales at Encounter Bay, for greater scrutiny of industrial aquaculture, and for an urgent response to the recent up-listing of the iconic Australian Sea Lion to 'endangered', as well as participating in long running advocacy to protect our wonderful network of marine sanctuaries.

High profile River advocate Kate McBride continues to act as our Healthy Rivers campaigner, this year in partnership with the Australia Institute. We have provided briefings to politicians, high profile submissions and reports and appeared before various parliamentary committees. As the end of the Murray Darling Basin Plan Mark 1 approaches, so does the pressure to ensure the environmental targets are delivered.

The Joinery continues to be the heart and centre of our Living Sustainably work. This well-used venue provides a vital meeting and connecting space for Adelaide's environmental warriors. We also host many school groups keen to look at our various demonstration features and a huge number of events and other activities. With SA embracing bans on single use plastics, we continue to push for further improvements in our iconic Container Deposit Scheme and provide advice to a range of expert waste-related working groups.

All of this work would not be possible without our wonderful, hard-working staff and volunteers who do so much incredible work. I would like to acknowledge and thank our Executive Committee members for their support and guidance, and all the many people who act as our Representatives and Nominations to various Government Boards and Committees. Also, our various Working Group members and member group delegates. And a special thanks to all our generous donors and supporters who enable us to do our work bravely and independently.