

Report to members by LIPS President at the 2009 AGM

Thank you all for taking the time to attend the 2009 LIPS AGM. 2009 has been a huge year for LIPS and for the LIPS executive, and it has actually only been a ten month term! We began our term in December just after the departure of Steve and Louise from the island, and spent an exhausting five months scheduling volunteers to man the island, training new volunteers, and taking care of the day-to-day management of the island from the mainland – hopefully a task we won't have to repeat! Thanks especially to Alex, who bore the brunt of the labor, and to Quicksilver, who ferried countless volunteers and workers to the island. The executive committee also spent many hours in those first few months creating administrative systems to make the job of future executive committees much easier, including revamping the email and membership procedures, and rewriting and re-formatting the volunteer training manual.

As we discussed at our first general membership meeting in December 2008, our priorities were to focus on increased communication with members, lobby, fundraise, and submit grant applications when appropriate to help conserve the marine environment in our Shire, train more volunteers, and follow up on a number of potential projects, including maintaining the walk, involving the younger generation in activities, creating T-shirts for volunteer caretakers, and working towards establishing an environmental museum at the Sugar Wharf with a focus on Low Isles. At that first meeting, there was also a strong call from the membership to address the issue of turtle conservation at the island.

I hope you all, as members, have seen for yourselves quite an increase in opportunities to communicate with the executive committee. We have held quarterly general membership meetings, where we reported on the activities LIPS has been up to, as well as monthly full moon barbecues to give members a chance to raise questions or concerns. By updating the email procedures, we were able to more efficiently disseminate and receive information from all of you. Some of you may even feel we have overachieved on this task, with the number of emails you receive! On a serious note, I do hope that you feel your voices have been heard and responded to by the executive.

Secondly, lobbying, fundraising, and grant applications. With the help of Ed Green, we put together an extensive submission to the Cairns Regional Council about the waterfront redevelopment plan. At this stage, all submissions have been incorporated into a final plan, and the waterfront management committee is conducting a final review before forwarding its recommendations to the council. We note several positive aspects of the final plan – first, there will be no removal of mangroves from the upper Dixon Inlet, second, the area east of the marina will be maintained as a park, and third, the slipway will remain where it is until an alternative slipway comes on line. However, the Meridian resort has been given the go-ahead.

We also made a submission to GBRMPA about the importance of hiring a full time island caretaker, and not relying on volunteers for the long term. Fortunately, they did hire Rick for a one year contract, but the management of the island has moved from Commonwealth Islands to Field Management, and we do have concerns over the long term future of this position.

In collaboration with Heidi Taylor, of Tangaroa Blue, we successfully applied for a grant from the Department of Resource Management (DERM), to conduct workshops and activities in Port Douglas and in Fraser Island to create awareness of the impacts of marine debris and how people can change their behaviour to reduce the amount of marine debris. Through this project, 20 presentations were given to a total of 570 prep through grade seven students from Mossman and Port Douglas. Cleanups were conducted on Four Mile Beach, Cooya Beach, Low Isle, Woody Isle, and Snapper Island, removing over 300 kg of marine debris. A follow up cleanup of Snapper Island was conducted two weekends ago, and removed approx 450 kg. As a result of this project, Cairns

Regional Council has provided two rubbish bins at additional access points on the beach. Thanks to Heidi for coordinating and running this grant.

We have also successfully applied to the Combined Club for a grant to conduct turtle monitoring at Low Isles, to the Mossman Bowls Club to assist in revamping our heritage walk signs, and to GBRMPA to fund Dixon Inlet water quality testing. These projects are all still ongoing.

With GBRMPA's assistance and support, we also applied for a very large grant from the Jobs Fund, to pay for infrastructure needs on the island. We have not yet heard the results of this submission.

Our third goal was to train more volunteers. I briefly mentioned this earlier, but during the time period when we did not have a caretaker, Alex and Meredith more than doubled our number of trained volunteers to approx 40. Additionally, we were quite fortunate that Rick was chosen as the new caretaker for Low Isles, as Rick and Alex have made abundant opportunities for volunteers to caretake at the island, even when they have been around. The volunteers have helped with a number of projects around the island, including cleaning mould off interior and exterior areas, and painting the volunteers cottage. The most valuable contribution, however, has been to do the normal island duties, so that Rick & Alex can perform other maintenance tasks, that in the past, might have had to be done by contractors,, which helps the island to be economically sustainable in a period of economic downturn.,

Regarding our specific project goals, thanks to the support of M&R kitchens, we were able to produce volunteer ranger shirts to reward all of our faithful volunteers for their hard work! We also worked with Elliott Davidson, from Mossman High School, to mentor two work experience students, Hannah and Zundara, who partnered with Sally & Rod Sutherland to create recommendations for updating the LIPS heritage walk, created a display to highlight LIPS activities and learned about island caretaking from Alex. Their greatest contribution was the creation of a mini museum in the Old Power House, which has been immensely enjoyed by many island guests!

We worked with the Douglas Shire Historical Society to add a LIPS component to their display at the Sugar Wharf during Carnivale, to support the proposal to Cairns Regional Council to create an environmental and historical museum at the Sugar Wharf. Thanks again to Jan, and to Helen Robertson and Valda Reynolds for their assistance in this project. Although the CRC does not seem to be highly supportive of this effort, we have now shifted our attention to creating a museum in the lighthouse.

To that end, we created a subcommittee to consider logistics and planning for a lighthouse museum. There was some confusion over whether or not the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) was prepared to open the lighthouse, but we recently received a visit from Lyndon O'Grady, senior technical officer at AMSA. He was quite keen to have the lighthouse opened, as there are currently none open in Queensland, and the Low Isles light is a very unique construction. Discussions with AMSA are currently ongoing. Steve Edmonson is drafting out a simple inexpensive proposal on behalf of LIPS and the Tour Operators.

Our final mandate of the year, given by our membership, primarily as a result of increased turtle hunting at Low Isles, was to address turtle conservation at the island. We formed a turtle subcommittee, and have created a plan of action involving turtle monitoring, education, and liaising with the indigenous community and with GBRMPA. This has been a slow process, as we want to make sure to build strong lasting relationships, but we will continue to move forward.

Lastly, there have been some projects which have arisen throughout the year, including putting together a Carnivale float for the first time in many years, setting up a booth at the Great Aussie

Arvo concert (thanks again to Jan, and to Sally Sutherland), and many thanks to Annji Rodgers, who continues to create and disseminate “Save our Butts” canisters.

In addition to all of the exciting projects, we have had a number of challenges arise. Of course you are all aware of the intense media interest in the indigenous hunting at Low Isles. We have tried to advocate for conservation while treading a neutral course, so as not to hinder any future collaborations and projects. In addition, we have had to be mindful of our obligations as volunteers to GBRMPA, and to respect their communications policies.

As I am sure you are aware, the composition of your executive committee has changed quite a bit over the year. First our treasurer Mike resigned, but fortunately Nicole has stepped into the role, doing a stellar job in taking over both treasurer and other duties! Next, Alex was called off to Low Isles, but despite being away from the mainland, she has still been a fantastic vice president. Then our secretary, Meredith, moved to Western Australia. Julia Hazel has been filling her shoes, and has also done an incredible job. This, combined with my absences of several months, has highlighted one of our major challenges, that of recruiting and retaining a strong committee. This is why we recommend that next year's committee adopt as one of their major priorities to recruit additional members for the executive.

In summary, we have had a very busy and productive year,

My suggestions for goals for next year:

- 1) Strengthen executive, recruit more people
- 2) Lobby for island caretaker position to remain (and work with GBRMPA stakeholder meeting)
- 3.) Follow up on the proposals that are being put forward by the Turtle Working Party