

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-20



**MACKAY
CONSERVATION
GROUP**



Most of Australia’s mangrove species can be found in the estuaries around Mackay. They provide food and habitat for invertebrates, fish, birds and other wildlife.

Contents

Contact us 3

President’s Report..... 5

Climate Change & Coal 7

Rivers & Oceans 9

Biodiversity & Protected Areas 11

Volunteers 13

Finances 15

Contact us



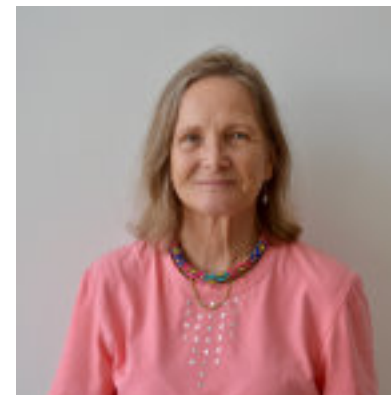
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President's Report



2020 has been a disrupted year with a global pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus, but Mackay Conservation Group remained strong even under these difficult circumstances.

Throughout the year we have seen several staff changes, with Emma Barrett, Michael Kane, Kate Coxall and Nicky Hungerford finalising their tenure, and I would like to thank each of them for the significant contribution they made to the work that MCG does. We recently welcomed Wendy Eiteneuer as Environment Centre Manager and we are looking forward to an ongoing relationship.

Remaining staff, our Co-ordinator Peter McCallum, and campaigner Ashleigh Wyles have been excellent and have adapted their roles to be more streamlined and efficient within such a small team. I cannot adequately express my thanks to both Peter and Ashleigh for the way they have held things together. Peter may have anticipated the impending pandemic as he had already ordered new staff laptops and audio-visual equipment for the 'zoom' meetings that were to become the norm. This equipment has been thoroughly tested during the 'work from home' lockdown, and the AV equipment has enabled access to us all to several experts who gave presentations that may have been less easy to manage previously.

MCG has been an active group since 1984, and I marvel each year that we punch well above our weight with what we achieve. This year we have persisted with the Stop Adani campaign, and have been pleased to engage some electrifying new young volunteers. Zombie projects such as the Urannah Dam and East Point development have re-emerged, and I wonder how many times we must fight the same battles. I am sure you have noticed the fabulous mural on the front of the Environment Centre. This work is thanks to volunteer artists Kate Brunner and Lalune Croker. Thanks too to Brendan Franklin for his voluntary assistance with the signage. The mural represents the native species we work to protect.

The work of MCG is only possible through our volunteers and through the many small and sometimes very large donations we need to remain viable. Thank you to those of you who contribute in this way. Making a donation may be the easiest and is arguably the most effective thing you can do to help MCG. Our staff are constantly looking for grants and funding opportunities for our lobbying and advocacy work.

We have seen the word 'unprecedented' used for the bushfires, drought, rising temperatures, species loss, polar ice melts, coral bleaching, and fish kills in the Murray Darling eco-system, and while our governments have listened to the science on how to manage the pandemic crisis, it is disappointing that they are seemingly ignorant of the science of the climate crisis. We need action on this front to keep fossil fuels in the ground.

I relocated to Brisbane this year, and maintaining my role as President has not been easy. For this reason, I have decided not to re-contest a position on the management committee. Happily, most of the existing management committee have indicated that they will accept re-nomination, and I am excited that some other exceptionally talented people are also planning to nominate for positions. I hope we can elect them all.

I must thank the outgoing management committee for the essential role that they, and all management committee members over the years have played in keeping the group going. Mackay Conservation Group has been a big part of my life for a long time, but I am confident in the staff, and the strength of the new management committee and know I am leaving it in good hands.

Christine Carlisle, President

Reliance Creek National Park contains remnant riverine palm forest that represents a type of ecosystem once common on a large part of Mackay's coastal plain.

Climate Change & Coal

Burning coal is the single largest contributor to global warming. Queensland's 51 coal mines, most in Central Queensland, make the problem worse, both physically and politically. The sudden end of the coal boom in mid-2012 caused a major economic downturn that our community was not prepared for. Mackay experienced a rapid increase in unemployment, housing prices plummeted and businesses went into liquidation. Fear of another coal industry downturn was part of the reason for the strong vote against the ALP in Central Qld in the 2019 federal election. As a result, politics in Australia have changed. Politicians understood the message from Central Queensland electors to be that pro-coal policies were needed to win power. Soon after the election the Adani mine was given the green light and politicians went quiet on climate change.

Central Queensland is already feeling the effects of climate change more than other parts of the world. For example, an average day was 1.9°C hotter in Mackay in September 2020 than thirty years earlier. The big question we asked ourselves (and continue to ask) was "how can we provide a counter-narrative to the pro-coal one coming out of Central Queensland?". We have to do that because good climate policy is being held back in Australia by concern about the politics of regional Queensland and regional NSW electorates.

In 2019-20 we planned to recruit concerned people in our community to speak out about climate change. Our analysis indicated that there are many thousands of people in the region with strong concerns about climate change that we have not yet reached. We organised events for people to meet and develop plans together.

- September's School Strike for Climate attracted more students than ever before.
- About 70 people attended the Slade Point community environment forum.
- The Kuttabul Fire Forum gave a local community on the frontline the opportunity to meet experts in fire management and climate change.
- Several other events like those were held in the second half of 2019.

The bushfire crisis that affected every state in Australia was clearly the biggest climate story of the year but it was largely forgotten once the Covid issue emerged. As a result we were unable to recruit a large number of new people. The Great Barrier Reef suffered from its third mass-bleaching in five years, this time affecting reefs off Mackay for the first time. Once again we saw a clear example of climate change affecting our world but that story went largely unnoticed by the media.

Climate change is the most serious environmental issue facing the world and every region of it. We will continue to try to find ways to prevent climate change being politicised and ignored. That means continuing to campaign for a clear plan for our region that includes no new coal mines. If we don't meet that challenge we will continue to see more climate induced natural disasters.

Economically, coal does not have a bright future. Solar and wind can produce electricity cheaper than coal and gas, battery prices are falling rapidly and there are global efforts to find alternatives to coking coal in production of steel. If Mackay is to avoid a greater economic catastrophe than the one we witnessed in 2012-14 then we need a clear plan for transitioning our economy away from dependence on coal mining.



Fires ravaged Eungella's rainforests in 2018. A taste of the disaster Australia would face one year later (Photo: Desley Williams)

Despite dire warnings from scientists about climate change, coal exports continue to dominate the economy of our region. We need to plan for a future without coal.

Rivers & Oceans

Reef Regulations

For several decades reef scientists have been warning that the health of Great Barrier Reef ecosystems has been declining due to poor water quality, climate change and increased intensity of cyclones. Key ecosystems are most affected by polluted runoff from land based activities. As a result, Coral reef cover has declined by about 50 per cent since 1985.

During 2019-20 Mackay Conservation Group ran a campaign to raise awareness of the need for regulation of land-based activities to reduce the impact of poor water quality of Great Barrier Reef ecosystems. In July 2019, MCG employed a graduate marine ecologist, Imogen Clark, to undertake a three month pilot program to highlight the need for new laws on reef water quality. Imogen spent her time meeting farmers, scientists and members of the public. She explained our position on reef water quality and listened to other people's views. Her project culminated with a meeting at the Mackay Entertainment & Convention Centre. We heard from the Qld Environment Minister, Leeanne Enoch and reef scientist, the late Jon Brodie, among others. Members of the audience were very concerned about reef water quality and the impacts of climate change.

In November 2019 the Queensland Government enacted new laws (known as the Reef Regulations) that require farmers to undertake a number of actions to protect the reef from pollution. The most pressing issue is to ensure that excessive fertilisers are not applied on soils that can't absorb them. This means that farmers in the sugar cane industry must undertake compulsory soil testing and keep records of the application of fertilisers.

Urannah & the Burdekin

Mackay Conservation Group also kept a watching brief on the Urannah Dam proposal. We are very concerned that the dam may destroy a number of beautiful streams west of Mackay for no reason other than to satisfy the egos of some politicians. The Urannah and Massey Creeks flow in to the Broken River downstream of Eungella Dam. Eventually the water from those streams makes its way to the Burdekin and the Coral Sea. Many species depend on the river, including some magnificent examples of Black Ironbox. The streams are also the main location where the unique Irwins Turtle is found.



Widi traditional custodian, Ken Peters-Dodd holds an Irwins Turtle (Elseya irwini) at Urannah Creek. This unique species may be driven to extinction by a dam.

We have been working alongside the Widi & Birrah traditional custodians to ensure that this important waterway is not destroyed. In 2020-21 we will continue to raise awareness in our local community about the impact the dam will have on nature and build community opposition to the proposal. The proponents of the dam have received \$13 million in federal taxpayers funds to make their case in favour of the proposal. We are lucky to have some very generous donors who have supported this campaign to date but we will need to raise a significant sum to continue this work.

Water will become a major issue in North & Central Queensland in years to come as politicians put forward populist proposals to alter our rivers. None of the proposals that have been suggested so far including the New Bradfield Scheme or construction of Urannah or Hells Gate dams make any economic sense. The 2020 Queensland election showed that they did not convince the majority of voters either. If we are to protect our rivers from becoming the next Murray-Darling disaster, we must convince local people that the environmental values of our waterways are worth fighting for.

The proposed Urannah Dam will destroy Urannah Creek, Massey Creek and part of the Broken River. These beautiful streams are the most pristine in Central Queensland.

Biodiversity & Protected Areas

Each year in Australia the number of species headed for extinction increases. The processes that drive declining biodiversity are also increasing. The definition of biodiversity is quite simple. It is a measure of the variety of species in a region. However, biodiversity has taken on a much larger role than just a mathematical value. Environmentalists have campaigned against projects that reduce biodiversity because the biological diversity of a region is an indicator of its ecological health.

Native plants and animals have an economic value. Koalas, birds and other native animals attract visitors to our state and our country. Here in Mackay, the council has been promoting tourism based on the natural values of our region, including wallabies that feed on our local beaches and the beauty of our tropical rainforests. The Great Barrier Reef is a biodiverse environment that attracts millions of visitors to our region. Bush foods are becoming more of a part of the restaurant experience in Australia and around the globe. There are many other important economic benefits of biodiversity but we should not only be concerned about economic impacts. Every species benefits humanity, regardless of whether we have found an economic value for them.

The human spirit is badly affected by loss of species. Knowing that plants and animals are being driven to extinction affects our individual psyches. It is depressing to know that unique fauna and flora will not exist for future generations to know and love. Animals, plants and the landscapes in which they are found are also fundamental to First Nations people in Australia. The spiritual value of biodiversity is huge but impossible to quantify.

In environmental systems, human activities that reduce natural habitats are causing major reductions in the diversity of beneficial species. There is widespread concern today about pesticides used in agriculture and in urban environments and their impact on insect populations. Often they are the species that pollinate flowers, ensuring that food trees produce fruit and that forest species reproduce so we can harvest timber for construction and other purposes.

Our region has its own challenges. Species such as the Eungella Honeyeater and Irwin's Turtle have a very limited range and are threatened by processes that limit their ability to find suitable places to live and obtain food. Those processes include logging in native forests and the construction of dams on rivers.

We can all play a part in increasing biodiversity. In our urban gardens we can plant local native trees and shrubs that insects and birds feed on. Farmers can also help by setting aside land that is not highly productive and allow the native plants to return, providing habitat for our wildlife.

There is a lot more to do, however. The decline in biodiversity means that it is more important than ever to set aside areas in national parks to ensure that animals and plants have secure locations in which to live.

Queensland has the lowest proportion of land reserved in national parks of any state in Australia. Both the Australian and Queensland Governments have committed to reserving 17 per cent of the state in protected areas. They include national parks, state forests and other reserves that ensure the plants, animals and landscapes that make our country unique are protected.

We haven't yet reached that ambition. If we fail then future Queenslanders may never know our country as they should. The environment movement convinced the Queensland Government to release a Protected Areas strategy to detail the process for reaching the 17 per cent goal. During the 2020 election campaign the Queensland ALP promised to fund a Protected Areas Strategy and provide significant funds to secure more national parks in our state. That is a great first step but we will have to all work to ensure that the government meets that commitment over the next four years.



There are more than 550 animal and 2200 plant species endemic to the Mackay region. Many of them are found in Eungella's tropical rainforests.

Volunteers & Environment Centre

Youth & Faith Groups

Ashleigh Wyles began organising volunteers in our community in March 2020. Just after she started Covid-19 hit us and she had to work from home. This shifted a lot of her community engagement work to cold calling, text blasts and emails and was pretty hard going. Ashleigh was able to make some progress though, engaging seven people who were interested in joining a faith group and four in the youth group. Ashleigh was new to this type of work but obtained great support from the Sydney Alliance, a community network that aims to bring a broad coalition of organisations together to campaign for change.

Since then, the youth group has grown to have ten members and successfully held an online School Strike for Climate on September 25. They have also launched a petition calling for a just transition toward renewable jobs to be presented to George Christensen and Julieanne Gilbert. Another aspect of Ashleigh's work has been speaking to schools about climate change. She has spoken at St Patrick's College and North Mackay High and opened a dialogue with Holy Spirit College and Mackay Christian College.

The faith group has been meeting regularly. They are hosting their first event in mid-November and hope to run an eco-faith study group next year. There is great room for this group to expand going forward as there is a strong tradition in the church of stewardship. In 2015, Pope Francis released his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, about Christian environmental responsibility and the idea is moving toward the mainstream. Anyone with an interest in joining this group could contact Ashleigh at the environment centre on 07 4953 0808.

Volunteer Events

Volunteers are the main people who keep Mackay Conservation Group running. Our members and supporters attend rallies, write to newspapers, contact politicians, collect petitions and many other jobs. This year we launched the Swim for Our Rivers event with the help of many volunteers. One Saturday afternoon we gathered together at the Pioneer Pool to swim laps for a good cause. Together we raised over \$20,000 to help protect the Urannah Creek from a dam. That was a great event that we will run again this year, hopefully we'll be able to include supporters from all over the country next time.

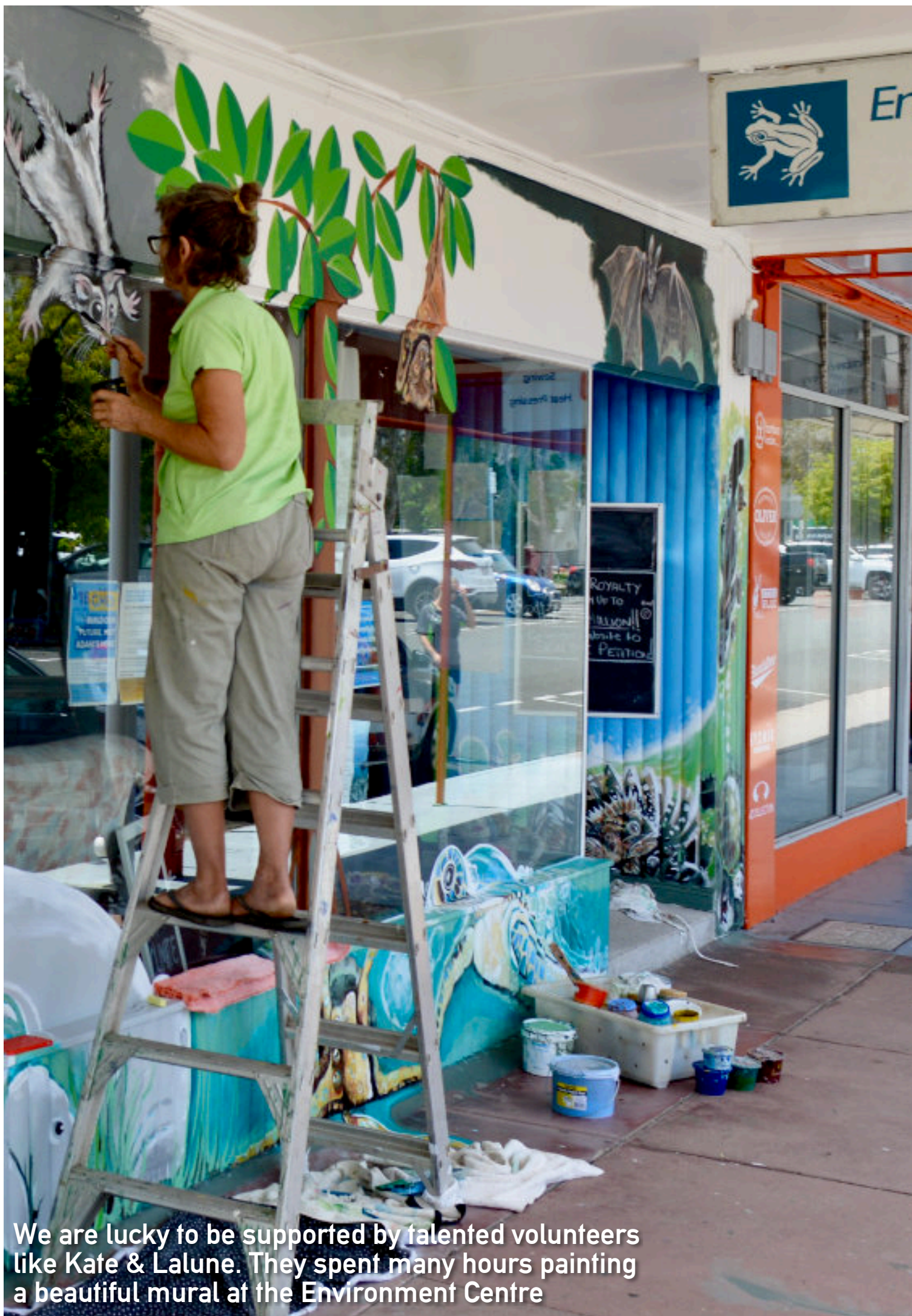
Environment Centre

This year the Mackay Environment Centre celebrated 25 years since its official opening by Dr Bob Brown in September 1994. The environment centre was established to serve three key functions:

- to provide a base for paid and unpaid research and campaign staff to work from
- to raise environmental awareness in the community
- to permit like-minded organisations to share resources such as meeting space

In 2019-20 Mackay Environment Centre continued to fulfil all of those criteria. We have had up to five part-time staff working from the environment centre at different times during the year. Mackay Conservation Group has used the centre to provide training sessions for volunteer campaigners and to hold public meetings on a broad range of issues. Other organisations regularly use the facilities at the Environment Centre. They include groups concerned with protection of particular types of species, organisations that work on environmental rehabilitation and groups concerned about climate change.

In 2020 we employed a new Environment Centre Manager, Wendy Eiteneuer, whose job will be to ensure we meet each of our aims even more effectively this year. Wendy will be working on a range of projects to make the environment centre a more central place for environmental action in our community.



We are lucky to be supported by talented volunteers like Kate & Lalune. They spent many hours painting a beautiful mural at the Environment Centre

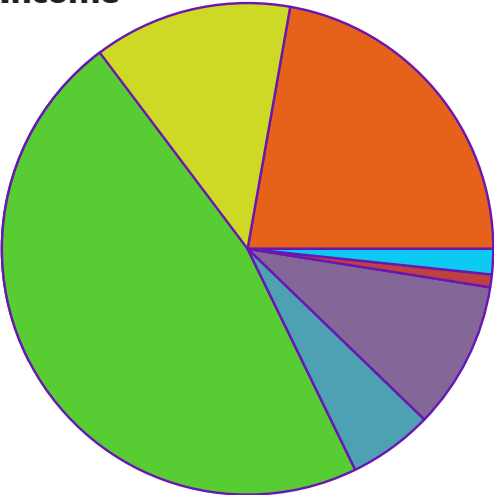


Members raised tens of thousands of dollars to protect Urannah Creek by participating in the Swim for Our Rivers event at Pioneer Pool.

Finances

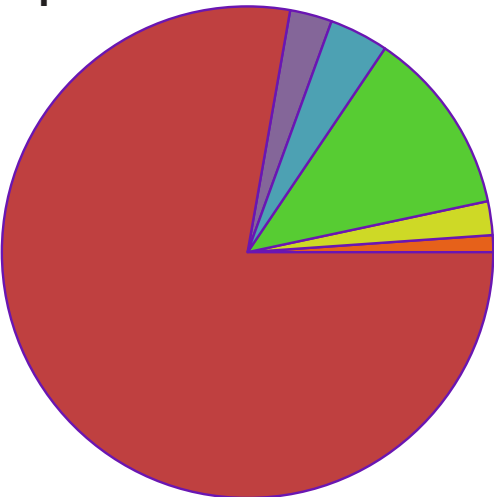
Mackay Conservation Group’s finances are still quite sound despite the Covid-19 epidemic. Our income was down in 2019-20 compared to the previous year. In that year we received some large one-off donations. We also received a grant in 2018-19 that would be expended in 2019-20. As a result our income and expenditure is in deficit for the year.

Income



Donations	40,500
Sales, Commissions & Fund Raising	23,400
Grants	85,000
Cashflow Boost	10,100
Jobkeeper Subsidy	18,000
Trust Distributions Received	1,500
Interest Received	2,900
Total income	181,400

Expenses



Accounting & Bank Fees	3,800
Depreciation	6,600
Environment Centre	37,500
Campaign Costs	11,600
Travel & Events	8,600
Wages & Superannuation	238,300
Total expenses	306,400

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a red top, and a man with a blue cap and blue shirt are standing outdoors. They are holding a large white sign. In the background, there is a red and white striped banner with the word 'GOODS' and a sign that says 'DEFEND OUR WATER' with a blue arrow pointing up. A rainbow flag is visible on the left side of the frame.

SIEMENS
schür keine Feuer!

#STOPADANI