

Glen Innes, Alpha, QLD

19/01/2015

It was exactly two years ago today that Jenny Gursansky emailed Bimblebox for one of Maureen's books. She thought the book was marvellous and she sent it to people she thought could be influenced to preserve Bimblebox, including Clive Palmer's wife and Germaine Greer! Jenny said she wished to help my campaign. It was such a relief to hear those words. I handed over my wish list, to which she added some items of her own, and we embarked on a journey of building more awareness and a healthier bank account to save Bimblebox Nature Refuge (BNR). After a few months of manning stalls with goods and displays of BNR in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, we realised that there was simply too much to do for the two of us. It struck us that having a group behind us (a suggestion that originally came from Derec Davies) was a good one, and so the concept of forming a 'friends of Bimblebox' group kicked off.

But who to invite? People had written to me over the years offering to give me a hand as the vicissitudes of the coal threat to Bimblebox received more and more media attention. Now it was the time to take them up on their offers. The job of going through seven years' worth of emails has turned out to be worthwhile to uncover the gems I have here today at our AGM and as members a year and half later.

### **Welcome to the first Bimblebox Alliance (TBA) Annual General Meeting 2016**

It is now three years since the Queensland and federal governments gave their approval for the China First/Galilee Coal Project, but not one 'amazing little black rock' has been shifted from under us. On paper government approvals for Waratah's coal project are viable until 2073. A long time indeed to live with the threat over our heads of relinquishing our Nature Refuge to the dozers. But we now have 50 members at The Bimblebox Alliance Inc, which helps it feel a little more secure. Our first meeting was held on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 in Brisbane (Skype was a lot of help for those of us miles away from the capital) and we have had meetings at pretty regular intervals since then.

Over the past eighteen months we have kept our members and supporters in the know about Bimblebox, as well as the other proposed mines in the Galilee Basin, via emails, the Bimblebox website, Facebook and Twitter. We also send out two different Newsletters that together have a reach of some 4000 people – one from BNR (via Mailchimp) and the other through the Galilee Basin Alliance.

Bimblebox is still mentioned as a test case of the absurdity of mining on protected areas in many and varied ways. It has been discussed in university lecture halls, in various publications and blogs, in The Conversation, local school newsletters, as well as by our fellow NGOs. Articles and opinion pieces have appeared in newspapers, with the Courier Mail and the SMH also offering online readers a link where they could watch 'Bimblebox'

the documentary for free. Public screenings of the documentary also continued to be held during 2014-15, at Bribie Island, Noosa, Ipswich and at the University of Queensland.

The Bimblebox artists were in the media as well, bringing much needed awareness with their travelling exhibition 'Bimblebox: art - science – nature', which is still going and heading to Armidale next. There have also been other beautiful exhibitions and workshops that attracted much interest in Brisbane ('Bimblebox 153 Birds'), Ipswich ('Bimblebox MMXIV') and in regional centres. 'Bimblebox 153 Birds' was also exhibited at the Brisbane Writers Festival.

There was no doubt what the Newman Government thought of the likes of us who opposed coal development. In the hope they would not have such overwhelming political power after the 2015 state elections, we wrote to the candidates, asking where they stood on mining in protected areas and trying to create as much publicity as we could around our request. Nothing really came of it, even when Labor was swept into power. During the last year we have tried to catch the attention of the new Minister for the Environment by meeting personally with him and writing to his advisers. Although the new government feels a lot easier to work with than the previous one, no tangible improvement in the status of nature refuges has been achieved. Yes, a disappointment but not a surprise.

After we launched The Bimblebox Alliance (TBA) and the new five minutes video on Bimblebox at the Avid Reader in November 2014, we focussed on developing a strategy for safeguarding Bimblebox. We did this through working on a 'power map', on an 'action plan' and on 'six areas of interest'. Thanks to persistently low global coal prices and Adani's trouble getting the Carmichael project up, the threat of mining on Bimblebox has all but disappeared. Our efforts now are gravitating towards keeping informed on wider issues, attending and reporting on conferences like Beyond Coal and Gas, Queensland Trust For Nature, Property Rights Australia; joining EDO law jams; submitting submissions relevant to our principles; supporting the campaign to prevent French Banks from destroying the Reef; sending Ian Hoch's prose to ABC Open during the United Nations Climate Change Conference, and more.

We have made good contact with Protect The Bush Alliance, Queensland Conservation Council, National Parks Association of Queensland, Lock The Gate, Mackay Conservation Group, Places You Love, Sunrise Project and Australian Earth Laws Alliance. We had other individuals and organisations helping us out, like The Wilderness Society which commissioned the second and last batch of the 'Bimblebox' documentary DVDs, the [Protect The Bush Alliance](#) that made funds available for Paola and Sharyn to attend the World Parks Congress, Tangible Media for their massive technical and graphic support, and [Mark Roberts](#) who created a very detailed map of Bimblebox. Bookmarks got printed instead of business cards, and brochures were made for quick info at our stalls. We enriched our coffers by selling Maureen's *Bimblebox: A Nature Refuge under Siege* (with inserts inviting the readers to join TBA) at various outlets, Maureen's Bimblebox critters, and the DVDs. We also added new tabs on the bimblebox.org website, including a new PayPal paying facility to allow easier transactions for people buying our goods and raffle tickets for the famous quilt online.

On the ground at the Nature Refuge, in early 2014, the [Galilee Bus Trip](#) of 40 concerned citizens stayed for a couple of nights. Later that year Bob Brown turned up with the promise he would mention Bimblebox in his travels, and in fact we are in his latest release 'Green Nomads'. A young Italian journalist put together a [report](#) for a prominent Italian newspaper in the sweltering heat of last summer. September Art Camps are still very popular.

Since early 2015 we have been dealing with Department of Environment and Heritage Protection officers and Waratah Coal after we made a complaint regarding the decommissioning of the drill holes (which were a breached condition of the Environment Authority). Scientist still come, albeit not as frequently as before the mine was approved, doing new surveys or adding to old ones.

We had phone conversations with a public servant in the Natural Resources and Mines Department who is close to the Coordinator General office, to get a sense of the possibility of Waratah applying for a Mining Licence. He says there are a couple of different scenarios that could transpire and he will let us know if any development comes about, which in my experience in dealing with departmental staff means 'I don't mind if you keep ringing me, but forget about me ringing you'.

Leading up to the World Parks Congress in Sydney (WPC) in Nov 2014, I believed the event would give us a huge opportunity to tell the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) what Australia really did with 'protected areas'. Incidentally, at one of our TBA meetings, we were presented with very interesting research that opened up the possibility of taking Minister Hunt's approval to mine Bimblebox to the High Court, on the grounds that obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity weren't met (although after lengthy discussions with the EDO we decided not to pursue the objection).

However, the WPC turned out to be a big disappointment, and it was a huge learning curve for me. Please read Lee Curtis' comprehensive report of those 10 days in Sydney (Nov 2014) at the end of my report. How naïve we were to believe that by talking to people at the 'top', mining or other inappropriate development on protected areas would definitively be struck down from the IUCN what-not-to-do list. (It is just like hoping that pleas to government ministers will be taken into consideration, but if the issue upsets governing party's powerful mates and donors, forget it!) In short, the Congress was a loud talk fest, where organisers made sure that no sponsors got annoyed by little peeps like us who wanted to show (with evidence!) that this huge pompous organisation had no teeth to stop the destruction of protected areas, that their 'jurisdiction' stopped at every Nation's sovereignty to do what they bloody-well-wanted with protected areas even if an international treaty was signed.

Moral of this expensive exercise? If we want change, we don't go to an inevitably powerless high ranking body, but to the people at the bottom. No one pays us, we get tired and disillusioned, but the fact that we still get indignant when we hear of environmental disasters and we still get together to discuss the problems, makes me feel I am in with the right mob.

We made contact yet again with the old hand at the nature refuge office, Allan Williams, asking him and Minister Miles the same favour that was asked in 2010, to let Nature Refuge caretakers communicate by allowing our details to be known to each other. It should give us more members, thus more lobbying power. Of course EHP knows that and won't oblige, it's too risky. Imagine the media frenzy if half of all NR owners ripped up their NR deed in the case of mining occurring in one NR against the wish of the owner?

So... It's only a matter of finding a way to spread the word and more will come to join us.

Wishing us all peace within, and peace to all creatures we share our living spaces with.

All the best for 2016

Paola Cassoni

President TBA

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## **Report to DAF RE World Parks Congress**

**Lee Curtis, 27 November, 2014**

Protect the Bush Alliance and The Bimblebox Alliance Inc. attended the World Parks Congress (WPC) in Sydney from 12-19 November where, thanks to the generous grant from the Dorothy Ann Foundation, they hosted a very popular exhibit booth, engaged a stream session (fancy term for 'spoke to a group of people sitting around in a circle), on the quality of governance of Protected Areas using the state and national government's permitting of the mining of Bimblebox Nature Refuge as a case study, presented an e-poster (<http://nbsapforum.net/#read-resource/1049>) and attended a wide variety of sessions and workshops.

Six of us took turns manning (or rather womaning) the booth. The registration fees for three of these, as well as their travel expenses, were generously paid for by DAF along with the outrageous booth fee.

I am embarrassed to say that the conference organizers were the worst I and the majority of the 6,000 delegates who attended the conference have ever encountered. The program was only available as an app or on the congress web site, which made things very difficult for those who were not techno savvy and/or those from third world countries who did not have access to smart phones, iPads or computers.

The Venue was the Sydney Olympic Park – a dandy venue for the Olympic Games but not a good conference one, unless you are a marathon runner with a GPS who is able to navigate their way to the room/hall in which one of 18 simultaneous events are being held. Upon arrival to your destination, you are more likely than not to discover a note on the door saying that the venue has been changed and is now being held at the other end of the park on the top level of the football stadium in the far room behind the bleachers.

While Tony Abbott was making an ass of himself at the G20, Minister for (haha) the Environment, Greg Hunt was shamelessly selling porkies at the WPC. At the opening ceremony the attendees were very impressed with his welcoming speech in which he took credit for the previous government's green credentials giving the impression that Australia was still a leader in all things environmental. By the end of the week, however, most of the wonderfully passionate and intelligent delegates took Hunt's promises with a pinch of salt and much sadness. Armed with a healthy amount of skepticism due to the fact that they have to defend their parks and reserves on a daily basis from encroaching government stupidity and industry greed, they discovered (with our help) that like most politicians, our Minister was full of globally warmed air.

You will be interested to learn, though undoubtedly not surprised, that the IUCN is in part funded by fossil fuel giants such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton, among others, including our personal favorite, Shell. There were over 200 delegates milling around the conference with name tags that did not display their affiliation. Word quickly got out about who they were.

They were also hosting, co-hosting and/or sponsoring large fancy exhibit areas with cushy seating areas and goodies called Conservation Finance (<http://www.slideshare.net/valeriefakir/conservation-financejourney-vf31oct2014>) and Business and Biodiversity (<http://www.icmm.com/page/108288/news-and-events/upcoming-events/articles/iucn-world-parks-congress> brought to you by... drumroll... the International Council on Mining and Metals!

We learned that the structure of the IUCN consists of the Secretariat on the one hand and six commissions – education and communication, legal, species, protected areas, (run by volunteers) on the other. Needless to say, it's the commissions that do all the work and the Secretariat that does all the schmoozing nowadays it appears, mostly with the fossil fuel giants.

Being able to speak with so many fascinating people from all over the world, hear their (very similar) stories and share our ideas made the trip very worthwhile. Thanks to the reluctance of the owners to let a coal company on to their Nature Refuge, Bimblebox is the first publicly known case of an IUCN listed Protected Area slotted to be destroyed in favor of what is planned to be the world's biggest coal mining precinct. This case garnered a lot of attention and despite our booth being carefully hidden in the back of beyond, we were the only booth that declared loud and clear 'no mining of our Protected Areas!'

A senior member of the IUCN Protected Areas commission met with Paola and Patricia to discuss what might be done to help IUCN Protected Areas Category VI – probably nothing – but it was worth a go. It was obviously embarrassing for the IUCN to admit it has no influence over a government not honoring the commitment to protect protected areas. Yeah, sounds redundant, doesn't it? The IUCN established the Protected Areas management classification categories which governments can choose to adopt when signing the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity but the IUCN has no powers to enforce those categories. But it could establish a rating system on how well those Protected Areas are being managed.

Bimblebox is the test case for another 100+ Nature refuges that could be mined for coal. We have discussed the possibility of having Patricia Julien, the previous Coordinator of the very pro-active Mackay Conservation Group, apply to be on the Protected Areas Commission then sending her to the 2016 IUCN Conservation Conference in Hawaii, which is estimated to attract 8,000-10,000 delegates, to continue hammering home the Bimblebox cause from a different angle i.e. presenting a motion for changes to IUCN Protected Areas Category VI to clarify what actions can take place, and state that development should not take place if it requires offsetting a Protected Area such as a Nature Refuge. All Nature Refuges in Queensland are Category VI.

The IUCN is also working on an Offsets Policy and Patricia attended a workshop at the Congress on that and will present a submission.

While we were aware of similar challenges faced by US and Canada landowners regarding coal and coal seam gas mining and pipeline construction, we learned that many governments in Africa and South America are also being coerced into accommodating the big fossil fuel extractors at the cost of losing agricultural land and conservation areas. We have learned that human rights and the rights for nature share the same seat in third world countries. The same mining companies in Australia that lobby our politicians and 'suggest' policies and legislation in their favor, in other countries engage private police to intimidate and in many cases destroy villages and shoot those that try to contest their business. (Oh, by the way, all is peachy keen in Russia. They had the most impressive display of the Congress including food and drink, including vodka at night, and constant entertainment.)

The future looks pretty grim. The problem is, we are all so busy trying to keep up with the damage being done in our immediate surroundings – staging protests, writing submissions, mounting campaigns and raising funds to pay legal fees, it is not easy to find time to communicate with the rest of the world about how to address this situation on a global scale.

Despite the grim outlook, all of us are extremely grateful to DAF for allowing us to participate in this event. We all learned a lot, gained an entirely new tier of support for our cause and will endeavor to keep our movement growing via social media internationally. I have to grin when I think of Bimblebox Nature Refuge bumper stickers on cars in Benin, Pakistan, Kenya, Bolivia, Russia or Madagascar, among many others.

Since the WPC, two horrific events have taken place, the first is the Queensland State Premier announcing that we will fund the building of the railway for notorious Indian Adani mining company (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-17/rail-line-to-link-australias-biggest-mine-to-port/5896154>) and the second is the deregulation of local water usage by resources companies (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-25/qld-plan-to-let-miners-take-billions-of-litres-of-water/5916740>).