

## Keeping the bastards honest

On 12<sup>th</sup> September I attended Cardwell Shire Council's Town Planning Meeting, and witnessed the Council acting unlawfully in passing a development application to subdivide Lot 176 on RP846515 on Midgenoo Road, north of Tully.

There is a complicated history to this application, but the simple fact is that Council Officers recommended that the application be refused on four grounds. This recommendation was pointedly signed by the Town Planner and the Planning Officer and the Deputy Director of Engineering Services.

In addition, the Chief Executive Officer also provided a report, which said in its first paragraph:

*"During discussions between the Mayor Tip Byrne, Cr Galeano, Department of Local Government and Planning Representatives – Mr Peter Jones (Regional Manager for N.Q.) and Mr Mike Hartley (Principal Planner) and Council Officers on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2002, Mr Jones clearly stated that it was unlawful for Council to approve this subdivision."*

Nevertheless, Council **did** approve the application by 8 votes to 1, with Cr Nicholson dissenting and with Cr Stark absent. The discussion showed that Councillors were clearly aware of the unlawful nature of what they were doing.

This leaves the Council open to legal challenge, and if this happens, their defence would be at the ratepayers' expense. This is outrageous conduct and I have written to the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Nita Cunningham, requesting that she intervene.

In addition it should be noted that Cr Carmel Silvestro spoke for, and voted for, the application when she is the sister-in-law of the applicants, Vincenzo and Sarina Silvestro. This would seem to be an open and shut case of 'conflict of interest'.

Coming, as it does, on top of the special treatment given to cane-farmers in the recent rate rises, one wonders whether this Council is being run by cane-farmers, for cane-farmers, to the detriment of everyone else.

*A copy of my letter to the Minister and relevant reports from the meeting*

*agenda are available at Mission Beach Environmental Management Group's web site:*

<http://home.austarnet.com.au/davekimble/mbemg.htm>

### Cassowary Speed limits

The cassowary safety strategies being deployed on the Tully-Mission Beach Road by Department of Main Roads are under-pinned by the 80 Kph speed limit.

Data loggers have been monitoring drivers' speed in response to the unfolding conditions, and the data collected so far indicates that there has been a reduction in mean speeds from 97 Kph to 88 Kph in March 2002 and down to 86 Kph in August 2002.

The 85th percentile (the speed which only the fastest 15% exceed) has reduced from 108 Kph in December 2001 to 87 Kph in March 2002, and has since risen to 95 Kph.

DMR only has data to August at this stage and cannot yet evaluate the effect of the line marking.

### Ethanol fuel

*Queensland's 1.7 million cars use nearly 3 billion litres of petrol per year. In December 2001, Environment Minister, Dean Wells, announced that a greener fuel was coming to Queensland, called E10. As its name implies, E10 is a blend of 90% unleaded petrol and 10% ethanol (Ethyl Alcohol), derived from homegrown sugar.*

*It sounds good, but are the environmental and economic claims made for this wonder fuel really all they are made out to be?*

This article is too long to print here, but is available at my web site:

<http://home.austarnet.com.au/davekimble/ethanol.pdf>

Briefly, 10% ethanol mix has been tried before in Queensland between 1929 and 1957, and its technology is well understood. It can take as much as 75% of a barrel of Middle East Oil to make a barrel of 'green' ethanol.

So using a 10% ethanol blend like E10 saves only 2.5% of fossil Carbon Dioxide emissions. It's marginally better than nothing, but it's not going to save the Planet.

### The Green Alternative

If you are seriously looking to help the environment, you could just buy a smaller car and drive it around a bit slower. It saves money too.

If you decide to go the green way, then the land that would be cleared to grow more cane to make more ethanol could be left as natural bush that acts both as a carbon sink and as wildlife habitat, without any expenditure of energy at all.

And if the uncleared land was adjacent to a river or wetland, then it would act as a sediment and nutrient trap, improving water quality on the Great Barrier Reef.

At the same time there would be a considerable saving in wear and tear on our roads if there was less cane hauling, and less air pollution from the chimney stacks at the mills.

All in all, there would be much greater environmental gains if the sugar industry was to be wound back by retiring cane production on riparian strips, poor soils and flood-prone land, and refusing all permits to clear more native vegetation.

The crude economics of sugar in 2002 mean the export industry cannot compete with Brazil and the rest, and should now be contracting, not expanding.

### Rewarding good practice

Cardwell Shire Council could be helping by rewarding land-holders who agree not to clear high conservation value land with rate relief. The Johnstone Shire Council have a system in place and it has been very successful.

Cardwell Shire Council have \$25,000 seeding funding from EPA to get a program up and running, but they have decided not to use it.

They argue it is State legislation that has stopped people from legally clearing (*Vegetation Management Act*), so it should be State money that compensates the land-holder, not Council money (rates).

I can't see a problem with the local government area shouldering **some** of the financial burden of improving environmental standards.

π Dave Kimble