

QUEENSLAND

6 months on, 23 steps back



The Queensland government is pursuing the Tully-Millstream Hydro-electric Scheme proposal in the far north of the state, which would see a 95-per-cent decrease in the flow of the Elizabeth Grant Falls.

Kevin GUY

One year since the Queensland state election, and six months after the Borbidge-Sheldon-led coalition grabbed the reins of power, ACF Executive Director Jim Downey's prediction that the election of a conservative government would see a back-sliding in environmental programs is ringing true.

During the 1995 election campaign much was made of the 'greening' that the Queensland coalition was apparently undergoing, but their performance to date puts a lie to this claim.

The Queensland Conservation Council has documented the

STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

recent environmental actions of the coalition. They indicate the level of the government's commitment to environmental protection and advancement very clearly.

In just six months the government has:

- 1 allocated no resources for the South East Queensland Regional Air Quality Strategy
- 2 scrapped the South East Queensland Transit Authority, which was established to oversee integrated regional transport planning in south-east Queensland. A Department of Main Roads, however, was created.
- 3 reneged on the \$100-million commitment to Brisbane Busways Strategy
- 4 frozen establishment of the proposed Moreton Bay Regional Authority rather than applauded, stymied initiatives that advance multi-interest negotiation, for example the Premier condemned the historic Cape York Regional Land Use Agreement which was signed by ACF, the Wilderness Society, the Cape York Land Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Queensland Cattlemen's Union
- 5 put the East Coast Conservation Zone on hold, conditional on the outcomes of the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy
- 6 continued to pursue the controversial Tully-Millstream Hydro-electric Scheme proposal. The Minister for Mines and Energy approved the Labor government-initiated

\$2 million land purchase within the scheme area.

- 8 proposed to replace community representatives on the board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority with departmental bureaucrats
- 9 supported the extension of the electricity grid north of the Daintree River. The attempt was blocked in parliament only by the sole Independent, who holds the balance of power.
- 10 supported an increase in the sale of crown land, which would diminish the extent of controls on tree clearing. The Minister for Natural Resources has approved further clearing of certain species of vegetation.
- 11 failed to protect the habitat of the endangered mahogany glider from vegetation clearance in far north Queensland
- 12 put on hold the activities of the Forest Working Group which was established to develop a cooperative program to identify and conserve high conservation value forests
- 13 proposed, through the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Forestry, a review of the 'no woodchips' decision
- 14 put on hold all meetings of the Native Species Plantations Initiatives Reference Group
- 15 remained silent on the previous government's commitment to a \$10-million, four-year conservation program for threatened plant species
- 16 stalled on converting ex-forestry land into the Bunya Mountains National Park, and abandoned the World Heritage nomination for Bunya Mountains on the basis that the local community does not support it
- 17 put on hold the national park land acquisition program, with funds redirected to day-to-day management of existing national parks
- 18 approved guidelines for public consultation in preparation for private tourism development within national parks
- 19 given the go ahead for the controversial Oyster Point resort and marina development at Port Hinchinbrook, claiming all

conditions have been met (see page 7)

- 20 frozen the additional \$3-million funding for integrated catchment management, allocated by the Goss government
- 21 placed under consideration the damming of Kidman Creek in the Obi Obi Valley, which had been ruled out by the previous government
- 22 prepared legislation for compulsory acquisition of 23,000 hectares of land for CRA's Century Zinc mine pipeline in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Legislation will circumvent traditional owners' right to negotiate over the Century proposal, which would also suspend native title rights for the life of the mine.
- 23 introduced few initiatives to counter the far-reaching loss of the many environmental programs dismantled. The exceptions would include committing Moreton Bay to the East-Asian Australasian Flyway to guarantee a flight path for migratory birds, and approving in theory the cessation of coral dredging around St Helena Island in Moreton Bay.

ACF's position during last year's Queensland election campaign received considerable criticism from some members, other environmental groups and political parties. The post-election analysis has seen a flurry of accusations and counter accusations as to the role of non-government conservation organisations in the campaign. In part, the scoreboard above vindicates ACF's stance of telling it how we see it.

Progressive environmental reform in Queensland has been scuttled by the minority government – those in the run-up to the 1995 election who believed that the conservative coalition had radically improved environmental policies have been duped. The Borbidge-Sheldon government has re-introduced to Queensland the saying 'Monday one day, Sunday the next'. ACF will be continuing its campaigns to turn this situation around and bring the environment back on board as one of the state's key priorities.

● Kevin Guy is a Brisbane-based community development and mediation consultant and an ACF councillor for Queensland.