



On Friday 27th July, approx. 35 people attended the second Bellinghen Sustainable Business Forum, called the 2020 Vision forum.

Participants were briefed with a summary of the first forum in which the threats and impacts of climate change and peak oil were discussed, and the community's strengths and opportunities assessed. The group then developed an impressive list of ideas and strategies to put the Bellinghen business community at the forefront of this response.

This was following by information from Sue Lennox of OzGreen on the global effects of climate change and the urgency needed to respond to this challenge. Images of the break up of polar ice caps gave a sobering sense of the scale of the problem.

Jen St Clair spoke on the Bellinghen Shire Transition Towns Initiative and associated projects including the Food Futures Alliance, Seed Savers Network, and their swap market which has now morphed into a 'Free Market'. The group is working to build a groundswell of grassroots support as its visioning process leads to new projects towards the end of the year.

Jan also reported the evolution of 'slow talk', a recognition of the need to talk ideas through and reflect on varying perspectives. Four business operators then gave an overview of their approaches to sustainable business practice.

Kevin Doye from Kombu Wholefoods explained an ongoing process of improving sustainable practices from the first easy step of switching to 100% green power to their support for the local food network.

Alice Fisher spoke from the perspective of a home-based business on the challenges of tracing sustainability through supply lines, as well as addressing the importance of support for local producers.

Brian Sherratt of LilyPily Countryhouse spoke on building sustainability into a new business and promoting this difference to appeal to the market, "It's really fairly easy and it makes good commercial sense."

Manager of Bellorana, Sarah Churchyard spoke of their new ozone laundry facilities with cleaner air and less drying time, a change in mindset with staff & residents turning off lights and sharing energy saving ideas, and a request currently before their board for Energy Audits on all 25 facilities in NSW.

Forum participants then grouped to discuss what changes they would like to be reporting if back in the room after five years of positive action to improve practices in the Shire. Ideas ranged from strong local food production and public planting of fruit trees to large scale energy production and transport networks.

Below is a creative representation of many of these ideas from the perspective of a visiting journalists. It demonstrates bold and ambitious changes through a very well connected and coordinated community.



Bellinghen Sustainable Business Alliance (Bellinghen Chamber of Commerce, OzGreen, Bellinghen Shire Council and Waterfall Way Centre) would like to thank all participants and looks forward to further development of ideas discussed through future events.

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Forum Visioning Responses

Group 1:

- Business community really working together while promoting each other so that everybody prospers and their footprint is reduced – a change in attitude.
- Local business voucher book
- Education centre for people outside area based on our example of local food production
- Clear idea of what local is – whole of Bellinghen Shire
- Large green corridors for animals and plants in place throughout Shire from mountains to the sea
- Sustainable fuels run the Shire
- Bicycle racks and hire
- Tracks for mountain bikes as a tourist attraction in a sustainable way – good for environment
- Council Pedestrian and Mobility Plan (incl. Cycling) really implemented – infrastructure really in place based on current plan eg. Tracks need to be lined up
- Lots of bicycles (electric) available
- No dilution any longer of different groups and organisations but one alliance of businesses working together

Group 2:

- Skills Register
- Chemical free cleaning
- Energy efficient power tools
- Local employment and manufacture
- Regional connection
- Farming practices, local produce

- Value adding locally
- Incorporate Dorriggo and use their knowledge
- Local electricity grid
- New composting practices
- Changing the farmers' mindset
- Lead by example
- Free box for unwanted goods
- Work together and link coast to tablelands
- Provide link and keep everyone informed
- Council set emissions target
- Do not talk alarmist – be smarter about how we use what we have
- Organic farming and form cooperative
- Reducing power
- Community based farming
- Overcome isolation – between three towns
- Share ideas & work it into an economic plan
- Brand Bellinghen as a Green Sustainable Community Help with marketing Bellinghen Made
- Not alarmist but understand the urgency of the Climate Change situation
- Tourism is a vital plank of economic prosperity
- Ensure that current resources are used as well as possible
- Vision is Bellinghen operating on our own power grid

Group 3:

- Local jobs for kids
- Meaningful green jobs
- Local food in abundance

- Food tree 'capital'
- Honouring elders
- Different kind of profit recognised in business
- Investing 'profit' into future

Group 4:

- Places to gather and share skills – 'craft central' or 'men's shed' - mentoring
- Collective bulk purchasing of power saving devices, eg. Fluoro starters, solar panels, etc
- Bellingen power collective – generating power or bulk purchasing
- Local food production collective – community gardens
- Clean, light industrial area for food processing, storage
- Drinkable river and waterways (symbol of good wellbeing)
- All sewerage collected and converted for reuse (Ganges example - stock feed, energy, clean water)
- Local superannuation – keep local in fund for green jobs
- Local structure to empower individuals to take action eg. Bulk buy, local super

- Assess power leakages eg. Night use of footy oval
- More advanced carpooling – local support for online system (esp. Coffs, airport) – sms, web, noticeboard
- Mental shift to control of travel, meet challenge of freedom
- Innovation between car & bicycle, lighter transport options
- Buses – govt. link between school bus contracts and public transport i.e. force school bus contractors to run public bus service also
- Smaller (electric) buses to enable above – Coffs – Urunga - Bellingen – Dorrigo route serving visitors
- Commuter train Nambucca – Coffs Glenreagh

Other:

- Physical 3D or computer 3D model of Bellingen 2020 as above – project with Bell. High School

All generations have role to play, particularly older generations in positions of authority and influence – must take responsibility.

The following is a fictitious and independent representation of ideas discussed in the Bellingen 2020 Vision Forum. Note the date. Any similarities to real people or circumstances is coincidental.

Sydney Morning Tribute

20 January, 2015

A Clean, Green Lift to Waterfall Way

The Shire of Bellingen on the North Coast of NSW has made news around the world with its recent declaration of safe and drinkable water over its entire river catchment area. Sally Sleuth reports.

While Bellingen has gained a national reputation for its many popular annual festivals and markets, the big story emerging is one of a community on the move to create the most livable habitat on earth.

Following on from its commitment to ban plastic water bottles three years ago, Bellingen Shire has gained another sustainability milestone with the announcement from Council that its river systems all meet its standards for drinkable water.

The Prime Minister gave a tribute to the vision of residents in what he called a win for local self-determination.

"The people of Bellingen can be proud of an extraordinary achievement and an example to people across the globe - I'll drink to this success!" he added sharing a glass of sparkling Bellinger water with Mayor, Martin Joy.

The region has embarked on a bold, community-wide campaign to transform

business and lifestyle practices to carbon neutral and environmentally friendly benchmarks.

The effort will be known to many who have traveled to visit Bellingen. People booking holiday packages through the local visitor centre will find that travel miles in getting there are subject to an 'enviro-travel credit', a scheme to levy travelers to support local carbon reduction projects.

It turned out that the travel levy is more than a token effort to plant trees. Bellingen Sustainable Business Foundation has formed an investment fund, backed by the local credit union, attracting over 70% of residents' superannuation, estimated at \$12 million per annum, as well as \$10 million worth of shares issued locally to date.

The Green Life Investment Fund (dubbed the 'Green-Lift') is spawning an avalanche of similar funds in regional Australia, as people realise the advantages of channeling investment funds locally that previously were the

exclusive domain of the national and international financial market.

Green-Lift has enabled a re-engineering of many facets of life in the Shire from conservation projects to public transport, power generation, a bulk buy 'energy-saving technology' scheme, along with the aforementioned headline-grabbing river care project.

A practical example of the fund at work is apparent as soon as you are off the train at Coffs Coast station as an electric Green Lift bus saves you the cost of a hire car and swiftly sets you on your way to Urunga, Bellingen and the mountain village of Dorrigo, all in just under an hour.

CEO of the Foundation, Gary Briggs, invites me to the banks of the river soon after my arrival to tell me of the build-up to the current transformation occurring in the Shire.

"This community has long had a grassroots environmental movement with many people passionate about a change



they foresaw as necessary if our quality of life was to be maintained - beyond the oil age and through the climate chaos that was approaching.

"However five years ago this consciousness, I guess you'd call it, crept into the business community and suddenly a wave of planning and transformation surged to life.

"Clearly, warnings that were then considered alarmist we now know were good scientific assessments of the dangers and we've seen the Bellinggen communities form a powerful alliance to tackle these issues before they end up overwhelming us in a crisis situation."

The alliance is indeed remarkable, forming a web of remarkably coordinated networks extending through industry, small business, community groups and the local Council.

" We recognised at that time the need for deliberate, smart planning, lead by our community intelligence but in close partnership with Council and using the collective strength of all of our business networks.

"Some changes have occurred through innovative new business enterprises such as the Green Lift shuttle bus, others have been the result of empowerment of our local communities,

such as the public fruit trees lining many streets, or the community supported farms boosting our local food production and processing."

The fund has provided a strong stimulus to projects that may not have been supported by traditional investment firms or banks but have significant community value.

"While our organisation is actively encouraging residents to lower their energy use with bulk buy offers for power saving devices, the fund has also enabled us to support local power generation efforts."

On the Dorrigo Plateau, a long disused hydro power site is in the process of being reinstated.

"We estimate that with the two hydro stations coming online next year, a small independent wind farm now operational, and the escalation of subsidised solar systems being installed on commercial and residential buildings, our Shire will be energy self-sufficient within another five years."

Meanwhile, after setting the highest emissions targets of any council in Australia in 2009, Council has moved on to an ambitious sewerage treatment program that supports the clean river initiative.

Council's General Manager Bob Browning said, "We have adopted a

system first designed for the Ganges River to take all sewerage and process it into useful by-products - stock feed, clean water and energy.

" We have also adapted planning controls to ensure that our growing population is not serviced at the expense of what is an essential agricultural resource in the valley and highlands."

While many rural producers have hit an all time low as diesel prices tripling over the last two years, many Bellinger farmers have developed resilient approaches to stay viable and in some cases more productive than ever.

Tim Richy grew up farming the rich alluvial soils of the plateau and now assists young farmers and horticulturalists with a blend of old and new ways of working the land.

"I get great satisfaction out of seeing the enthusiasm of young people for farming techniques that were almost lost during the period of high pesticide use and machinery-intensive farming that now, with the sustainability costs added, prove to be less viable."

Tim's farm has support from locals that pre-purchase their annual crops and enjoy an active role in the life of the farm.

" Our customers - their families - visit the farm for



occasional 'barn-raising' days and for seasonal celebrations. They gain a great sense of ownership, their kids understand where their food comes from, and, even though many of us come from different worlds, we've developed quite a bond - some of them even help us to market the farm better."

Not all are quite as ready to invite the community onto their domain as farmer Jeff Anderson comments.

"I haven't got the patience for all this community building stuff but I did get a leg up from the Green Lift to get some of my hill country converted to productive use for bio-fuels, as well as adding a retreat to show these city fellas a thing or two - I know I'd be doing it tough without it."

Meanwhile, as inbound tourism figures have hit an all time low, the eco-tourism corridor of Waterfall Way linking the coast and tablelands of New England, seems to be

hitting a sustainable stride.

Gary explains their role. "We have a grueling process of training and assessment, as well as great mentoring support, for entrepreneurs wishing to receive investment support.

"We've also seen the growth of nature and eco-tourism market and have the good fortune of being able to support some very innovative, adrenalin activities in our World Heritage parks."

Accommodation providers have joined this challenge with all tourism association members gaining green star accreditation status.

With a network of bicycle trails and walking tracks linking the highest points on the plateau at 1560 metres all the way to the coast, the region is seeing a steady stream of visitors attracted to the dramatic highland to headland drop.

Locals are also hooked on the bicycle now that a subscription community bike scheme has made

bikes available at numerous handy locations in each town.

A stroll down the mainstreet of Bellingen illustrates an impressive commitment to support for locally made clothing, accessories, arts, handcrafts and food.

"We also recognised early on that unless local manufacturers were supported and local supply chains were strong, we were at the mercy of international events and transport costs - that was the impetus for our 'Made in Bellingen' branding

If it all sounds too perfect, it almost is but Mayor Joy is circumspect.

"Sustainability isn't an end, it's the process. We're celebrating the wins but we have many great ideas and we have a community that is ready to continue this transition.

"Even our young people are thinking twice about hitting the big smoke for their big life experiences - it's all right here for them."