

Minutes of the Community Working Group Meeting

Lord Howe Island Museum Library 8/2/2017

4.30pm – 6.10pm

Attendees- Andrew Logan (LHIB Board), Anthony Wilson (LHIB Board), Andrew Walsh (LHI Board), Esven Fenton, Jack Shick, Dr Frank Reed, Karen Wilson, Helen Tiffen, Therese Turner, Beth Wilson, Barbara Ardill, Peter and Robyn Curtin, Mark McKillop, Karen Wilson, Ian Hutton, Zac Veron, Rodney Thompson

Apologies: Penny Holloway

1. Introductions and Apologies

Andrew Logan explained he was Acting Chair in Penny's absence and opened the meeting at 4.30pm

2. Minutes / matters arising from last meeting and corrections

No corrections to previous minutes required and minutes passed.

3. Update on decision to delay program until 2017

Andrew Walsh gave an update on the decision that the project would not proceed in 2017. This was a result of key approvals (APVMA and EPBC) not likely to be finalised in time for the Board to make a full decision on whether to proceed or not with the operational phase in 2017. Decision also took into account the amount of time the community would have to fully understand the permits and approvals if they were approved.

Helen asked if the Board can make a decision on whether or not to proceed without all the approvals. Andrew W said they can but we have made a commitment to the community not to make a decision until all key approvals are in place. Helen then asked what the implications on finances mean for the delay. Andrew W advised that the Steering Committee has been briefed and members are happy to carry money forward to next year. There will be some additional costs offset with interest earned on invested money. Helen asked if the funding was State or Federal allocated. Andrew W said both roughly 50-50 split.

Rodney asked where all the \$9 million has gone. Andrew W replied that a large portion of it is still in the bank. Rodney asked if the agencies don't tick all the boxes what happens to the money. Andrew W said it will be returned to the funding providers. Rodney said he thought it was funny that the program got the money before a decision has been made. Andrew Logan explained the funding process, and that some funding agencies prefer to provide all funds up-front and some prefer to reimburse expenditure during the project. Rodney said he saw in the Signal that the program is already spending money so the Board must have been sure that the program was going to go ahead. Rodney also said that then people who have been getting the money to this point in time are obviously keen to see the program go ahead. Andrew W said that funds have been spent as part of the Approval process but that didn't influence decisions. Andrew W gave the example that Blue Lagoon had been paid by the project for accommodation for people associated with the project but it didn't influence Rodney's thoughts on the project.

Rodney asked when the submission was put into the APVMA and did Andrew W sign and tell them what he wanted written. Andrew said he submitted the application but could not tell the APVMA what to write.

Frank asked if the funding received had been indexed for inflation. Andrew W said all funds were already received with the balance accumulating interest. Rodney asked to see the financial reports. Andrew W said they were part of the quarterly Board meetings.

Rodney asked if he could see the documents that have been submitted to the APVMA. Andrew W replied that these had been provided previously.

Esven asked how much the delay would cost in financial terms acknowledging that there were other costs such as bird deaths. Helen asked do you mean in dead birds from shooting. Esven replied no, from rodent predation.

Rodney said that there were dead birds everywhere on the beaches currently and the rats don't seem to bother them. Jack explained the birds you are seeing on the beach at present are late hatching young that are well behind the other migrated birds and possibly abandoned by parents.

Rodney said that a scientist said that the poison wouldn't kill currawongs but in NZ it killed most of the birds when it was done. Andrew W asked who the scientist was and Rodney said he was here for a period of time walking around the Island. Andrew W said to Rodney that he constantly talks about scientists but can never divulge their names, details or reports. Helen said she didn't need to talk to the scientist as she had papers on the subject. Andrew asked Helen and Rodney to share them.

Rodney said that the Board is making the decision and they are the proponent for the project. Andrew L said that is correct and for lots of projects on the Island, the Board is the proponent. Andrew W said that there were many other decision makers in the process, Rodney asked where is the proof that it is safe. Andrew W said that that is what we are waiting for from the Human Health Risk Assessment.

Helen said that it was important that everyone had to agree to the project and said during the 2015 referendum process, many non-Islanders had voted. She commented that public servants aren't part of the community and their votes shouldn't have counted.

Andrew W said the options in the referendum were continuing the current control program or progress through to the Planning and Approval stage of the eradication. As the majority vote was in favour of proceeding to the Approval phase of the eradication, that's what the Board chose to do.

Rodney asked if it was safe to throw the poison out over the water, is that legal? Helen asked if Rodney meant the marine or fresh water.

Frank said that there is lots more information available on the project now and asked if there is scope for another referendum. Andrew said he wasn't in a position to answer those questions and would need to ask the Board. Esven said there had been a public submissions opportunity for people on the Island when the PER was out for discussion. People could have voted then either for or against through their submissions. Therese said she felt people don't feel comfortable making submissions or aren't capable of doing so because it was such a large paper.

Jack suggested having an open meeting every month to discuss the program as one person he had spoken still thought bait was going to be dropped on their roof. Karen Wilson made the point that the meetings were already open to the public.

Karen asked if Marine Parks had been asked to provide a submission to the PER. Andrew W explained the various separate assessment processes for this project and that individual permit applications are submitted to various agencies for their approval.

Rodney asked if the REP team supported aerial baiting when there were other options such as birth control. Helen asked if the APVMA has looked at the fact that fertility treatment for eradication is now available in the USA. Ian said that fertility agents are not an eradication tool and this has been discussed before. Ian explained to Helen that as discussed before in previous CWG meetings the fertility control is not an option for eradication as you have to constantly check all units and keep them topped with water as well as maintaining them in the environment. Helen said you don't have to get every rat. Anthony said the principles of eradication are that every rodent is targeted so yes you do have to get every rat otherwise it would just be a control program - the two principles are completely different.

4. Planning and Approvals – Update on progress to date

Chief Scientist – Human Health Risk Assessment

Andrew W then gave an update on progress of the Human Health report saying that the report will be completed very soon and will be released to the community. He said that he is still hoping to have a representative of the Office of the Chief Scientist come to the Island to discuss its findings. Therese said she thought 2 people were coming out to present the report. Andrew said he is still waiting on confirmation on who will be presenting the findings.

Rodney asked if the Board has insurance and is it legal what you are proposing. Andrew W said that we have discussed this before and we are going over old ground. Andrew W said copies of the Board's Certificate of Insurance had previously been provided.

EPBC Application

Andrew W gave an update on the EPBC application, saying that we were addressing some additional requests for information arising from where the public comment process. Peter asked whether it is normal practice for the proponent to get assistance in getting information for the report. Andrew W said that the REP program wasn't getting help from the DoE - we are continuing to answer any questions raised by them.

Helen asked has there been or will there be more experiments done in-situ on coral on LHI during the hold over period? Andrew W said that potential impacts to the marine environment with evidence from global studies were addressed in the PER and no additional local studies were planned. If Marine Parks requested additional studies, then these would be considered. Helen said that global evidence and studies on other islands doesn't count and needs to be local. Andrew W said the Helen cited Henderson Island as a global evidence of failure but never mentions all the successful islands. Helen said that successes elsewhere where only on flat tropical islands or rugged winter islands.

Esven said he thought it was a bit tough when the EPBC team get to decide whether or not to accept the Public Environment Report before the clock starts. He said they could just never accept it and never actually start the clock. He said this could slow up the approvals significantly due to bureaucratic process. Andrew W explained to the group that the Department of Environment assessors for the EPBC report will be coming to the Island possibly in early March. Helen said that when they come they normally only talk to the Board, would there be an opportunity to talk to everyone. Andrew Logan said they will have an opportunity to talk to this Working Group. Therese suggested a public meeting might be required because both wind turbines and rats are controversial programs. Andrew L said that both the rodent CWG and the Renewable Energy working group would speak to the representatives. Andrew W said that the EPBC team will also talk to both for and against residents individually.

Rodney asked Andrew W if he has met with the Chief Health Scientist and tell them that you supported the program. Andrew W said he has met with her and asked her to look at the human health aspect.

Peter asked if the Department of Environment assessors while on the Island would be assessing the Board's environmental management record. Andrew W said they could if they wanted.

Rodney said the Board has a role in protecting World Heritage Values on the Island. Frank said the Board is trying to protect and fulfil its obligations by suggesting an eradication project, which on the whole he is fairly comfortable with. He said he had read yesterday that the fertility treatment stations discussed need to be filled with water a couple of times a month and that would require a huge workforce of at least between 500 -1000 men to undertake it - it's not feasible.

Helen asked do the World Heritage people have a say in the program. Andrew W said the Department of Environment manages Australia's World Heritage obligations and report to the World Heritage committee. World Heritage is addressed in the PER.

Rodney said it will be interesting when a tourist goes up the hill and drinks the water and then goes back to Sydney and dies - the Board would be in all sorts of trouble. He said the Board is irresponsible.

Ian said it's not only the Board that supports the program. The Federal plans have listed rats on islands as key threatening species on lots of islands. Ian also said he is happy to support the findings of the approval authorities and accept their decisions either way - for or against based on facts. He urged the group to accept the government findings.

APVMA

Andrew W gave an update on the APVMA approval process and said that the assessment modules would not be back until late Feb and longer for the permit. Helen asked about the Providence petrels and can baiting be done when they are nesting on the mountain if you get the go ahead in May. She asked if you get a court injunction it might hold you up and for how long? Andrew W said that winter was the baiting window.

Peter said that the APVMA and NSW have an enforcement role for the use of brodifacoum off label, but public servants are immune from prosecution. Peter said there are clauses in the legislation with penalties for inciting off label use of poisons, which might be applied to members of the Community Working Group. Andrew W asked if that was like people putting Talon in their gardens off label.

Rodney said now that the program is not going ahead for 12 months that Anthony and Andrew should go away on a holiday.

Helen said that with the current large crop of palm seeds on the Island due to nobody picking them, the rats would eat them instead of bait. Andrew W said that bait was shown to be very palatable on island even with palm seeds around. Jack said he will run another trial to see the uptake between palm seeds and non-toxic bait similar to the trial conducted with exposed nontoxic bait.

5. Operational planning

Andrew W gave an update on the Operational planning with the Taronga Zoo people visiting the Island to inspect the site for the captive management facility at the nursery. Andrew W also advised that detector dogs had been purchased and were being trained for rodent and

biosecurity and would stay even if the rodent program doesn't progress. They will be trained to detect rats and mice, reptiles, amphibians, birds and ants.

Anthony gave an update on the Property Planning process and the Island clean up, with not much work remaining.

6. Jack Shick presentation

Jack showed a video of a non-toxic Pestoff bait trial that he had conducted in November 2016. The video showed how rats are more likely to take bait that is left in the open than in bait stations. Video showed birds not taking bait left in the open and the wariness of rodents to entering bait stations.

Helen said so what and that after 100 years the island had reached equilibrium.

Anthony gave a presentation of images of rats predated Black winged petrel nests at both Blinky Beach and North Head. The Blinky site is in the middle of a baited area while the North Head site is approximately 50 m from a bait line. Photos show rats carrying eggs from nests. Peter asked, based on that evidence, if the Board is addressing its obligations under the Threat Abatement Plan. Anthony said the area at Blinky Beach is baited on schedule and Andrew W said that's why the eradication project has been proposed, to meet a primary objective of the TAP.

Rodney said after seeing the photos that we must do something to get rid of the rats. Everyone agreed with Rodney.

Helen said she wanted it minuted that the CWG has never been a consultative group, she felt that the group has always been spoken to. She also wanted to know when the control of rodents had slipped on the island. Anthony said there are more bait stations now than ever.

7. CWG issues

Issues raised under other agenda items

8. Communication

Andrew Logan asked about communication issues with the CWG and any suggestions. Karen suggested using the community facebook page for CWG meeting announcements.

Esven and Mark left meeting at 6.05pm.

9. Other Business

Peter wanted to see a legal opinion from a legal representation regarding the legalities of insurance for the program. He also raised the question of compensation for the lodge owners for cancelled bookings.

Beth asked if the funds were bearing interest. Andrew L said yes.

10. Next Meeting

Next meeting was agreed to be scheduled for March when the Federal EPBC staff visit is confirmed. All agreed.

Meeting closed at 6.10 pm