

JUST FAMOUS ENOUGH NOT TO BE NOTICED

As told by
Michael Donovan

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2005 - 2013 Noosa | Semi Retirement, the Joke

Never fritter away a good crisis.

On May 8, 2005, we finally laid the ashes of our beloved dachshund Brig to rest in the garden. Carol, our kelpie-cross dog Saski and I drove out of the rear cul-de-sac which was lined with neighbours and friends waving us off and wishing us well. It was terribly emotional.

The cul-de-sac in Cassins Lane had, over the years, transformed from a line of residences on the western side fronted on the east by a disused military field hospital and to the south by a derelict milk depot into luxury town-houses, apartments and offices thereby increasing the value of the remaining residences many fold.

Our neighbours were of long standing so it may not be unexpected to hear we partied in the cul-de-sac twice yearly – upside-down Christmas in June and Spring get-together in October. A long table was setup to one side of the road allowing cars to

pass, not that traffic was expected because the whole residency of the lane usually attended. Everyone supplied a dish and drink. Good fellowship went on for hours, often past my endurance. So there was much heart-ache in our departure and the send-off.

Or am I misinterpreting the outpouring of these emotions as their relief at seeing us go?

Anyway, each year since we have spent a week in Sydney in early December catching-up with our friends. A number of them graciously hold BBQs or cocktail parties, occasionally a long table at a restaurant when we visit.

Worth mentioning is one neighbour John Chambers. John designed the hydraulics for the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympics 2000 on which Cathy Freeman stood and lit the Olympic flame. So what! Well, according to John, others interfered and made the process too complex and reliant on computerisation. If you watch the event carefully you can see the water flow falters. Water and computers. It lasts less than a minute until John steps in and manually overrides the failed computer to fix the problem all behind the scenes.

Our plans to move saw Carol visit Noosa some months before we relocated, stay with friends and look for a house to rent. Carol had chosen brilliantly. We'd decided to rent because visiting for holidays isn't living as part of a community. I also wanted to test my stamina for the interstate business travel regime in support of clients. *iMentor-pro* was virtual and could operate from anywhere.

We arrived safely at our dry-block house on the Noosa Waters canal estate. We secured a one year lease but six-months into the term the owners wanted to sell. We negotiated well using the remainder of the lease as leverage. We still owned our Sydney home which was then leased to a foreign bank executive. We have never looked back and enjoy Noosa immensely. The travel interstate didn't burden me. Driving the 135 kms to-and-fro to Brisbane was more of a drag.

Through a hospitality mate from Brisbane days Peter Sugg, I gained membership of one of the two top business clubs, The

Brisbane Club. My Brisbane based clients liked the quiet environment, hospitality and privacy for sessions. For a year, I *pro bono* mentored the Young Entrepreneurs Group of the Club. Peter established the Australian Conference and Events Bureau to which I was corporate-mentor in its early establishment days.

During 2005 and 2006 I did several Skype-based remote mentoring engagements under the NSW government funded program titled *Ignition - Pathways to raising Business Capital*. There were occasional face-to-face sessions when convenient. The purpose was to get the businesses *investor-ready*. Three notable successes from the program are Graham Hornabrook and Peter Sutton's *Opal Producers Australia Ltd*, Kim Macrae's *iKi Fit*, a range of fitness and exercise programs for kids and adults using iKi sticks; and *Ochre Health* a provider of regional and remote medical services who released a book in 2013 titled *A Medical Centre on the Moon* on how they became a success story. Drs Ross Lamplugh and Hamish Meldrum very kindly mention my work with them over about five years.

To assist the *Ignition* program leader, Helen Murray, I edited the draft mentor protocols to establish standards for the group and the program.

There is another client and project I wish to mention because of the foresight and persistence of the proposer John Alwyn-Jones. I first met John at Tourism NSW and helped him with a seat on the board of the caravan park operator Big4 Holiday Parks. During 2001/2 along with Dougie Hendry I had input to a concept of John's to own a cruise ship or three in Australian waters. John had correctly forecast the coming economic significance of cruise tourism and developed a plan for a new cruise line ahead of others in the marketplace. Southern Celestial Cruises may yet emerge in the local market.

In 2008, I would be asked to edit the mentoring handbook into a small business version for AusIndustry and Caloundra City Enterprises when they promoted courses titled *Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business* under a roll-out training

contract with TRAC Consulting. The program participants were each allocated a mentor to help with their businesses growth. I incorporated facets of the *AusIndustry World Competitive Service Certification* principles to enrich the revised content.

Around the same time I made a big mistake in being talked into the presidency of the Noosa Waters Residents Association (NWRA). At an AGM no-one wanted the role and my nodding as I fell asleep in the meeting was taken as consent. Naturally, the new committee wanted to make some changes. That brought the old committee out fighting and a tug-of-war ensued. After more than a decade the association didn't represent sufficient residents to claim to speak for all. It still doesn't but back then they acted as if they did and still do! After operating for over a decade the finances were petty cash for a supposed relatively wealthy community living in multi-million plus houses. The systems and processes were quill and ink.

The new broom set about dusting. Any idea to improve services, modernise membership or create new interests to grow membership got attacked by the cadre. As volunteers who had been press-ganged into service my committee sensibly decided to hand back the association and went out for a drink.

Noosa Waters is a canal estate. There are some 1170 residences split between dry and wet blocks meaning not having or having a water frontage as the case may be. The water frontage blocks pay additional charges for various services used by them alone. One incident is worth relating. Absolutely by chance the reformed committee which I chaired consisted equally of dry and wet block owners. It never came into our consideration, over efforts to improve the association, that there was any difference between dry or wet entitlement to be represented. We served all residents.

Not good enough for one James (John) Craig, formerly a big wig at Rio Tinto, whose email footer curiously included his CV highlights. Craig owned a vacant wet block but was resident in Victoria. Interesting character in that any push back to his rather

full-on style he labelled as bullying. John set about forming a break-away association exclusively for the wet-block residents. In itself not an issue if he could get sufficient to join but his justification was an attack on the new management committee using the most outlandish claims fed to him by some of the old committee.

We held a committee meeting with him and his fellow new group executive. They called themselves the Noosa Waters Resident Canal Owners Association (NWRCOA). John presented their 'case'. About half way through Ian Purnell the NWRA Deputy President called a halt. Ian then set to demolishing all the points as they were based on wrong assumptions using inaccurate data. For a start John believed all the NWRA committee were *dry-block* owners with no feel for the waterside issues of canal owners. It was pointed out in fact there were now five *wet-block* owners and four *dry-block* owners working together for both groups benefit. Each of his points was demolished as having no or only an implied basis on which to build a break-away challenge. Craig had not validated any of the information he was given. It was embarrassing. Ian asked for the source of the supposed evidence and of course it was the old committee.

On the business front my personal reputation grew from client word-of-mouth, as did my training and mentoring oriented speaking engagements given across the country. Melbourne Business School, Mt Eliza made contact. We exchanged ideas as to how a national coach and mentor panel might be created to hopefully tap the Alumni of the School. A group of nearly thirty senior coaches was assembled under the MBS brand led initially by Terri Mandler. Excellent training, tools and instruments were made available to professionalise the group to the School's standards.

I was the only person in this initial induction to have an extensive business background so I became the single executive-mentor on the books. In April 2007, Terri sought to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding for services from my group of mentors to augment the MBS talent pool. Terri took seriously ill and although she recovered, the School expanded the brief and

the Centre for Coaching in Organisations, managed externally by Whyte & Co., was created.

My contract with Melbourne Business School and Whyte & Co was to run seven years until retirement. I worked with a number of great coaches like Angela Bird, Warren Kennaugh and Doug Mackie.

These activities caught the eye of the UK based Blackswan group through their connection with MBS. I was asked to join the Blackswan Brisbane based talent pool initially servicing Rio Tinto. The MBS / Blackswan alliance broke up in 2010 but I continued independently with both. My client base experiences expanded to mining and minerals, petroleum, consumer goods, air services and real estate.

A month before relocating to Noosa, I had decided to add further to my functional skills-set and undertook the Swinburne University of Technology *GENOS – Emotional Intelligence Assessment and Feedback Course*. My Canberra-based business mentor David Lawrence did it with me. Not only was the study beneficial to my clients but it was also revealing to me, about myself. Part of gaining certification was to have the *GENOS* assessment done on oneself.

This gave me the opportunity to see if I had managed to modify my style and approach based on earlier feedback. It seems I had.

The results indicated I value integrity and fair play but I probably over commit and feel responsible for outcome failures because I am an over-achiever who wants to make a difference. I need to have diversity and to work towards a co-operative, inclusive and interdependent workplace. I am results oriented. I strive to offer staff opportunity for continuous improvement, seek innovative ways in which to tackle problems and to share information. I am a good listener. I push people to be the very best they can be, to take sensible risks and celebrate success personally. I expect and demand high integrity and ethical standards.

On the converse side, I still needed work to change aspects of my style. The feedback revealed I was still too impatient and applied difficult stretch targets on clients.

Between the five source streams of client supply made up of ARG, MBS, WhyteCo, AICD and Blackswan, my *iMentor-pro* was busy. Personally, I had a diversified client portfolio and was engaged in work I enjoyed. I ranked top in client satisfaction surveys, referrals and endorsements. My clients were located mainly in Brisbane but also across Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Auckland NZ with associated travel which I didn't mind. I was admitted to membership of *Fortune 100* a global cadre of mentors and coaches.

I am still bound by strict confidentiality with clients which must be observed even now but needless to say my work and task engagement was amazing. It has been a pleasure to sit with some of this country's leading executive talent and be a small part of their success and corporate rise.

Because of the nature of some work I was contractually subject to spot audit, lest I use insider knowledge for personal gain. My Australian Federal Police security clearance is no longer valid.

From late 2006, AICD Events Manager, Pauline Green, asked me to work with her to facilitate a few workshops for the Australian Institute of Company Directors Conference in Shanghai 2007. She also mentioned that a very high level business forum and study tour she and Peter Carre were organising would follow the main conference and be exclusive to a select group of influential Australian company directors. Would I be interested in assisting in planning and potentially facilitating or moderating all eighteen inter-cultural exchanges and briefings between the Australians and Chinese in Shanghai, Chongqing and Beijing over ten days?

Pauline developed the program and I did all background research for briefings and exchanges. When the package was sent out the take up of just twenty places was immediate. The

program covered visits to, briefings on and engagement with fellow opposite number directors covering - Five Rapidly Evolving Corporate 'Visions' of China; Winning in China; "Big Ticket" Issues in China's Growth; Yangshan Deepwater Port Complex; Shanghai Media Group; BHP Billiton China; Sino-Australian Company Directors Forum; Shanghai Stock Exchange; China Silian Instrument Group; CPI Yuanda Environmental Protection Engineering; Chang An Automobile Group; Three Gorges Dam Project; China and Commercial Law; Landscape for HR in China; Austrade's View of China and the Beijing Olympic Water Cube.

Pre-briefings were given in Shanghai to all participants together with daily notes on speakers and the host organisation. And each day debrief and feedback sessions were held (often including partners who had a separate program of activities). Within a month of returning to Australia I produced a written report for all participants in the form of an electronic book. Satisfaction of participants was off the scale. Good one, Pauline!

Part of this extraordinary event was a two-day trip with workshops down the Yangtze River to the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydro project. Along the way we passed niche coffins originally high up the river walls but now within arm's reach. Over a million local people were displaced by the dam. We visited their new city and the famous Shennong Stream by Pea Pod Boat with the traditional near naked boatmen. The dam has been a life-long project for Senior Engineer, Professor Wang Rushu who will be honoured when he dies by being buried within the massive structure, or so we were told.

Some years prior, I had escorted a group of tourism executives in Beijing to what was claimed to be the oldest Peking Duck Restaurant and continuous fired duck roasting oven in China. Their duck is legendary and the chilli and cashew nut chicken is sensational. Although I have not tried the pressed duck at Paris's *La Tour d'Argent* (which is supposedly superb, if one likes blood gravy), a visit is on my *bucket-list*.

Our final day was spent in closing sessions at the fabulous Commune by the Great Wall Kempinski. The history and first-hand inspection of part of the old wall structure was relayed to us by author and Great Wall expert William Lindesay founder of the International Friends of the Great Wall. Farewell drinks that night were late in a May evening when the cold was biting. A spectacular son et lumiere and fire-works lighting of the Great Wall produced a dragon-tail across the hills into the distance. The resultant heat plus aged cognac helped sustain us.

One story of many from the tour will amuse readers. At the Sino-Australian Company Directors Forum in Beijing we expected a group of similar numbers for a casual exchange of perspectives and views. We arrived to find an audience of a hundred with full two way simultaneous interpretation booth and media. As the facilitator I had to adjust the program to include more host speakers than expected and corresponding similar status courtesy replies from our side. The protocols were challenging. Thankfully it went well and closed on this humorous note.

Don Mercer, Chair of Orica was asked by a senior Chinese director as to what, in Mercer's opinion, is the prime role of the Chair? Mercer, a Scot, who incidentally loves very hot Hot Pot, replied, "To take the pulse of the board." The interpretation was made and sent through all headsets prompting a response from the questioner, "Are they sick often?" The Australian contingent fell about with laughter. Mercer went on to elaborate successfully to much applause and thanks. The event was a huge success and we all went to lunch.

My brother Terry died in August 2007. He had a medical appointment and having completed it went for a smoke and read in his car down by the Brisbane River. It seems likely he had a massive coronary. He had just turned seventy in May. The circumstance of his death was very stressful on the immediate family as he was missing from later afternoon of the day until discovered the next morning.

He had been unwell for some time and wasn't particularly good at looking after himself. He continued to smoke against all advice. Christine told me the recent death of his best friend Dennis Atkins, took a great toll on Terry.

In 2005 Terry had had a short fall from a ladder onto his wife while she was holding the ladder steady. He was attempting to clear the gutter of leaves in anticipation of a pending severe storm. He broke ribs and both collar bones.

Terry had extreme osteoporosis. His pain would reduce him to tears on occasions explaining it was like he had glass-shards grinding his spine. Moya had rheumatoid arthritis and had two operations on her pianist hands to correct ninety degree deformities. Dad also had mild arthritis. So far, thankfully, I have only very faint signs which are to be expected given the family history.

In interviewing Christine for this book she was very open about my brother's issues. Terry had been a poor financial manager, decried insurance and lacked initiative in keeping the house repaired and maintained. She had had to fight to keep Terry from selling the Kenmore home once it appreciated and had to secretly insure it. Terry would carry significant quantities of cash around and pay all manner of bills until Christine took over their finances just to get through. My brother had no insurance when he died having frittered it away on trivia.

Apparently, on occasion, there was a callous side to Terry in that he downplayed others' achievements meanly, even those of returned servicemen from the various wars, belittling or giving light of their experiences and horrors. I was much taken aback. I knew he had some strong views based on little evidence or misinformed opinion – a trait from our mother. He was intolerant of others' suffering and had hated being told what to do by Moya. He had few real friends due to a lack of effort to keep any. Christine saw Terry as the product of a latch-key existence. What of this had rubbed off on me?

One of the many books I read in my secret den under the Indooroopilly house years before was titled *A Book of Fabulous Beasts*. Described as old stories retold by A. M. Smyth, it featured

tales describing a dozen mythological beasts covering Phoenix, Barnacle Geese, Basilisk, Gorgon, Were-Wolves, Centaur, Salamander, Unicorn, Sphinx, Gryphon, Dragon and the sole real beast, the Pelican. These short essays fired my imagination.

Originally published in 1939, the reprint I have is dated 1946. The book was a hand-me-down from Terry. It originally cost once shilling and sixpence. I have recently repaired the spine and have passed it along back to Terry's grand-daughters as a memory of their grand-dad and uncle.

Note: It has been suggested to me this next part of my story may be a tad parochial and might be better served up as a sort of Epilogue. In as much as local politics plays a significant part, it is parochial but also unavoidable. Perhaps some content isn't as sexy as experiences already told but the events are interesting and personally important to the closing of my story. See what you think.

During our early 90s stint with the Brisbane bureau Carol and I had connected with several people who lived in Noosa. Two are Tony and Helen Flanagan who are great friends. Noosa wasn't completely new to us. Carol and I had purchased premium time-share off the plan at Club Noosa back in 1986 when the resort opened. We still own our shares.

Helen is a very accomplished cook, food writer and publications editor with an ear to local gossip and potential. She is a member of the Australian Society of Travel Writers and hosts an annual gathering of that clan each year in Noosa.

Helen pointed out a call for nominees to join the Tourism Noosa board. Her husband, Tony, had been on an earlier iteration tourism board many years before and gave insight into the local politics, cliques and relationships with other local tourism groups along the Sunshine Coast. He didn't do the real picture justice.

Between July and August 2005 there were moves to transition Noosa Tourism (TN) from a community sector board of council into an independent stand-alone entity financially supported by a

levy on business to finance the new Tourism Noosa Limited. Due to local politics, the evolution of the old to the new proved to be a challenge for both council and the organisation. I had the time and the interest. A majority of my mentoring client base was now local in Brisbane.

I scribed an application offering myself as the community independent director role and was asked to join the board in 2006. This relationship turned into a four year association, three years of which I was Chairman. During the period the forecast economic benefit from tourism to Noosa topped \$850 million and is a credit to the board, CEO and staff.

This meant Tourism Noosa punched way above its weight. During the attempted tourism regionalisation process it was revealed by the independent consultant's report Tourism Noosa was equal to only two other such successful destination marketers globally. This was estimated on marketing return spend per dollar of brand equity underwritten.

A tourism levy provided some \$1.86 million a year for marketing of member's tourism interests nationally and internationally. This is now up to \$2.5m. The Noosa experience product itself is wonderful having been built on the back of a long history of excellence in environmental conservation and what was top class infrastructure and low-rise urban planning. However, both infrastructure and planning need significant refreshing.

As the prime marketing agency for Noosa, Tourism Noosa had a thirty-year history of building brand equity second to none. As the Local Tourism Organisation (LTO) its reputation was well established and enviable. Tourism Noosa linked to the regional body, Tourism Sunshine Coast (TSC) and through this to the State run Tourism Queensland (TQ) which delivered international destination marketing.

Poll position competition in this chain of command was fierce and basically came down to a love-hate relationship where the disproportionate success of Noosa as the minnow gave the lampry, TSC, and the shark, TQ, indigestion.

During my first year as a director, the board was chaired by Boyd Williams and then Steve Molnar both from Sheraton, Noosa. Other directors, still on the board and who had also held the chairmanship, were Rick Cooper and Geoff Rickard. Some of these names are important as a series of inter-related events unfolded over the next few years.

In my due diligence, as I joined the board, I had identified weaknesses in the governance processes of the organisation and gaps in the operational management of the business. These needed fixing if the move to a new incorporation was to be successful. The board tasked me with guiding the process with management. Tourism Noosa CEO Phil Harmon decided to move on.

Additionally, Noosa has two significant natural occasional risks to its marketability – beach erosion due to rare tides washing away the famous beach and algae bloom from the north washing ashore and rotting. The latter smell is awful. Eventually a new CEO, Steve Cooper, working with our PR consultant Di Ainsworth, did a good job in creating specific *Emergency Response Plans* for both events and other natural disaster elements, covering a cascading chain of response, damage control and recovery.

Noosa Council, principally through the efforts of Councillor Russell Green, himself Council's representative on the Tourism Noosa board, funded the installation of a pumping system to return sand to Noosa beach from the Noosa river mouth and thereby reduce nature's impact. Noosa is also in nature's hands over recurrence of the algae which is thankfully very infrequent.

New CEO Steve Cooper eagerly engaged to bring the governance and operational elements up to a standard commensurate with the size and operational needs of the business. The documents put up for board approval included governance standards and a Code of Conduct for directors and members which, until then, hadn't existed and the establishment of a set of board sub-committees to tap the considerable skill-sets of the directors in planning and strategy review. Tourism Noosa was a small high-energy outfit with less than ten staff so its capacity and

effectiveness were augmented by involvement of the board off-line but not in any capacity overstepping operational management boundaries.

I've mentioned much of this 'fill-in' was needed because Tourism Noosa's structure was evolving from a community group linked to local government into a stand-alone company representing a large tourism industry base through direct membership which accounted for some seventy percent plus of the economic base of Noosa.

Steve Cooper and I had first met during my stint at State Transit when he was in marketing with State Rail. I had respect for his capabilities and was able to talk positively to the nominations committee before the candidate short-list was tabled to the board. One of the earliest projects Steve took over and delivered was the creation of an award winning new Visitor Information Centre (VIC) structure built at the eastern end of the famous Hastings Street. The old VIC hut was crumbling and did not match the projected image of professionalism required in a modern VIC in an icon resort location.

Council funded the building. The architectural design by local company Bark Designs has won accolades and the VIC now handles enquiries from hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. About one-hundred volunteer staff operated the Centre which is regarded as the best run and most effective of all VICs in Queensland. I pushed for hire car, taxi and bus drivers to be trained as tourism ambassadors. This is apparently now happening years after the proposition was tabled.

To aid in dissemination of papers, research sharing, director educational reading and on-line storage of each director's minutes and notes, we set-up the first virtual boardroom of any tourism organisation in Australia. This also facilitated Skype dial-in meeting attendance when directors were at remote locations.

It had so happened that at the end of my first year as a director, Chairman Steve Molnar was transferred to a new role within Starwood, his employer. The company sought to adopt my

recommendation we appoint an independent chairman. I was nominated as the new Chair and accepted the role. Part of the role included ex-officio directorship of the regional Tourism Sunshine Coast (TSC) along with the Tourism Noosa CEO.

Steve's predecessor, Phil Harmon, had had a close relationship with the CEO of Tourism Sunshine Coast, John Fitzgerald, a relationship which on face value seemed to benefit Noosa. But appearances as they say can be deceiving. They were. In reality the relationship was too cosy and lacked any substantive testing of return on our annual large investment. The four regional LTOs making up tourism operations across the Sunshine Coast jointly funded the operation of the regional TSC body.

Steve Cooper was already frustrated by a lack of integrated planning, marketing and sales by TSC on behalf of their stakeholders. Steve's expertise and questioning gave rise to many challenges to TSC's limited thinking. Cooper justifiably resented being treated in an off-handed way as the new boy on the block.

Frosty didn't describe the relationship between us two new Noosa directors and other TSC board members. Noosa representation came with a pre-designated reputation for not being trustworthy, not playing the game and causing upset. Noosa had little respect from any of the others on the TSC board. But, to be fair, Noosa was partially to blame for its own treatment. Prior Noosa directors on the TSC board had scant respect for many of their TSC brethren. It was a stand off without any serious effort to repair relationships.

Tourism Noosa's older cadre of directors believed much of the bad blood was just jealousy based on Noosa's reputation. It was true that Noosa achieved better-than-average customer volumes; greater success in leveraging its brand equity; engaged in clever deal making; consistently delivered a superior experience and had a higher media profile and customer brand image. All of which was achieved independent of TSC's regional marketing efforts. There was little humility from our directors to their peer set along the coast and because this had been going on for some

years some individuals just didn't like each other and could not be civil.

This appalling situation had flourished and grown into a negotiating barrier effectively obstructing sensible debate and mutually beneficial economic progress.

Over time I have attended many meetings with so-called Noosa notables and others. I was embarrassed by the appallingly discourteous performance of some of my associates. Many were so far up themselves I was surprised they didn't vanish into the proverbial. Some very well known entities seem to think it's alright or funny to act like *Hagar the Horrible* just for effect. Noosa can be and often is damagingly parochial.

Steve Cooper and I challenged this thinking – with our own board and with TSC directors. We worked hard to show we were different and that our word had value and integrity. Changing so many years of mistrust in an established circle of influence takes lots of effort.

The flow-on effect was so frequently apparent at our own board meetings when regional management issues were discussed. Mistrust, personal invective, rumour and innuendo, all worked to cloud judgment and thwart good decision-making. I observed this happening at meetings during my first year without the ability to make the connection until I sat on the TSC regional board and faced the problem full on. Tourism Noosa had blinded itself to some real issues by playing a one-upmanship game instead of dealing with business. That was about to change. With my election as TN chairman I moved to change the board's style of debate and discussion and then when I took up my ex-officio role on the TSC board, with Steve Cooper, we handled ourselves differently. We sought collegiality without giving up our pursuit of disclosure.

As part of on-going due diligence we discovered TSC, who were contractually in charge of marketing, hadn't held a marketing planning meeting with its stakeholder investor backers for over a year. Further, the time between dysfunctional board

meetings effectively saw TSC's CEO and the TSC Chair, running the business without adequate board oversight. This had to stop.

I pointed out the current annual business plan was nothing more than a repeated roll-over copy of the prior year (as it had been for several years) without any new adaptive thinking or progressive outcomes as to any of it being delivered. The allocation of funds from the four regions as specified in the contract of services simply wasn't reflected in the areas required. And so on it went! TSC pushed back partially due to embarrassment and partially because they didn't like Noosa. But the revelations started to sink into other directors.

Maroochydoore Tourism's outspoken board representative was Benny Pike. Benny is a local legend, sporting expert, raconteur, sports compere *par excellence* and ex-pugilistic hustler. A rough diamond for whom no holds were barred in a robust exchange. Over time Benny and I actually took a liking to each other. He said he didn't understand half of what I said and I was taken aback by Benny's earthy honesty. He was fun to be with and knew everyone of importance. Carol and Benny got on famously. Bennie and other TSC directors had issues which could easily burst forth at meetings. As I say the board was dysfunctional.

Once Noosa raised the lid on Tourism Noosa's concerns, it was Benny Pike who really pushed for TSC management to "Please explain!" His focus was the TSC budget process and return-on-investment by the partners given Annual Plan inadequacies and the lack of consultation and planning over marketing generally. On our side, Rick Cooper and Boyd Williams were not happy because the revelations reflected poorly on their terms as representatives of Tourism Noosa on the TSC board. They too had let matters slide while on their watch. I was able to give Rick an opportunity to make-good this omission by using him as an investigating ferret into the TSC books once Tourism Noosa decided to act. He forensically dissected the budget allocations to reveal a disturbing state of affairs.

Surprisingly, the performance shortfalls all happened with a senior Tourism Queensland executive, Leanne Coddington, serving on the Tourism Sunshine Coast board. She took no action as the government's funding representative. Why? I don't think it would have suited her agenda, if in fact she even recognised the issues herself. Still, she went on to become CEO of Tourism and Events Queensland.

I am aware of failings in other regional tourism bodies which went undetected by serving TQ representatives until discovered by fresh eyes.

Would it be too much of a stretch to suggest the state of play allowed TQ to dominate and influence outcomes. TQ wanted to control directly with regional management outside of a potentially questioning board environment? Due to the dislike of each other amongst the TSC directors the Board lacked a co-ordinated focus or will to challenge a dominant chair and a manipulative CEO.

To focus on solutions, I produced a discussion paper for the TSC board hoping the organisation could self-repair. I pointed out any 'investor' in the organisation had a right to question the value-for-money and the return on investment. I also pointed out the organisation was failing in delivery under its contract with stakeholders. The old animosities acted as a filter changing the message for relatively simple change into a threat.

The recommendations were rejected by a narrow margin. Still, it seemed the message was getting through to a few who knew something had to be done. Two directors, representing investment commensurate to the three-hundred thousand dollars from Tourism Noosa, got the message and also started to ask where the value was for the amount being paid by them.

I took the report and rejection back to the Tourism Noosa board who voted to terminate the standing agreement whose due date was imminent anyway. Benny Pike also withdrew his region's support. TSC sought Council pressure to intercede, which provided me with an opportunity to brief council on our concerns. Council was also an indirect investor.

At this point is where Noosa demanded and got permission for Rick Cooper to do a further detailed analysis of all TSC budgets. His thorough inspection brought to light even more financial conflicts which strengthened the case for change in the regional organisation. A series of far reaching unintended consequences then commenced.

While volunteering my time to tourism, I was still travelling to Brisbane and occasionally interstate to mentor a range of clients and to promote other mentors to new clients. One morning in August 2006, I was on the shuttle bus to the local airport when I received a call advising my mentoring business model had been assessed by the innovator and entrepreneur magazine *Anthill*. We had won a spot in the inaugural *Top 10 Cool Company Awards*. This was great recognition of our team and respect for our work from clients and this award boosted our exposure and model significantly.

While complimenting our business model, the judges mentioned a software initiative called *Socrates*. Working with Marcus and Tony Xavier I had taken process, measurement and outcome targets used by human resources to assess engagement progress. We created software functionality which recorded engagement between the mentoree and mentor to a national standard using the latest Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) Leadership Criteria. The software was aimed at government and large businesses where self-administered national and international support programs struggled with proper structure and defined benefit analysis. *Socrates* offered remote site management benefits to suit regional or overseas business operations

I worked with various agencies like the Australian Public Service Commission, the Human Rights Commission and State regional development agencies over a period of time presenting various workshops and conversation pits on subjects as diverse as leadership, networking and outcomes planning.

But, back to tourism. TSC didn't believe Tourism Noosa would actually default on the annual funding commitment. We did. TSC

objected but the three-year contract was up for renegotiation so Tourism Noosa was well within its rights to seek a new deal. The other regions wanted to follow us, except for Caloundra.

Our opening salvo attached strict conditions to any restoration of support. Benny took it one step further by initiating a formal letter to Council requesting a revised tourism model be considered. This got the newly amalgamated regional Council's attention. A consultancy brief was developed to study how regional tourism might be improved across the Sunshine Coast through changes to the representational structure and efficiencies combining buying power, regional membership, sharing regional information systems, greatly improved and more substantially funded marketing distribution channels and shared services. The successful Noosa tourism levy model was proposed to cover the larger geography to fund this initiative. This would also create a much larger pool of marketing funds.

All of this also coincided with a TQ review of the Queensland Tourism Network. The minister wanted to rationalise the funding of many into a better funded few. TQ now had a big stick. The new Sunshine Coast Council wanted to lead the field and the Pike letter was the catalyst.

Coincidentally in August 2008, the AICD asked me to sit in on a training session as a back-up facilitator. Imagine my surprise when the client happened to be Tourism Queensland directors and executive staff. As an insight into the organisation's leadership it was both enlightening and worrying. I felt conflicted due to the goings on with TSC and TQ over changes in structure across Sunshine Coast tourism. AICD were not so concerned and asked me to stay and observe.

I declined to repeat the experience when subsequent courses were presented because AICD would not permit use of my first-hand experiences as masked practical case-studies to engage with the participants. I felt AICD were providing theory with no practical challenge tasks within the context of real tourism sector examples.

At this point I will put the unfolding tourism saga on hold to open another strand of this developing *Gordian Knot*. In early 2008 the Noosa Council advertised for directors to form a new board to guide the establishment of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere designation in Noosa, the *Noosa Biosphere Reserve*. It was a start up with no operational template from UNESCO.

The successful UNESCO application had been commenced some years before and submitted in late 2007. My background suited one of the three independent director slots which sought business acumen, tourism and environment expertise plus finance and strategy along with governance experience. Apparently, my work with Tourism Noosa was well regarded. I was urged to put in an application for consideration.

I expected to be just one of the directors. The draft constitution required three independent directors be chosen from the community by publicly advertised application. The chair and deputy positions were to be sourced from this group at the recommendation of other directors who represented six community sector boards. Any nominee director being assessed by their peers also requires formal legal approval by the 'member' being Council to ensure proper governance and skill-set diversity. I was nominated and recommended as inaugural Chair. Council approved the nomination.

The next four years were the most satisfying of my life. I had the great privilege of working beside some of the most talented and intensely dedicated people I've met. While Noosa Biosphere Ltd was owned by Council, the board was independent and operated at arm's-length. There were eleven directors – three community directors, two council appointees and six community sector board representatives all sourced by public advertisement. Each community sector board comprised ten people with expertise and experience to match each sector covering environment, social, economic, culture and tourism to which education and research was added under this biosphere structure.

UNESCO established the Man and Biosphere Program (MaB) back in the 1970s. The program now has over 640 biospheres in a global family. The Noosa Biosphere was the first biosphere in Queensland and was followed in 2009 by the Great Sandy Biosphere abutting Noosa to the north. Dr Evelyne Meier was appointed chair of Great Sandy Biosphere in April 2010. These are the only two biospheres which have a common boundary anywhere in the world. Between them they contain the greatest diversity of flora and fauna in Australia, even greater than Kakadu, in Australia's Northern Territory.

For the 40th anniversary of MaB in 2011 Noosa was invited to submit a report on our outstanding progress over three years. I was careful to also recognise those who had come before the current community volunteers and whose efforts paved the way for MaB status. I wrote as follows on the opening slide of the submission – *“The Noosa Biosphere Ltd board recognise that we are the custodians of much prior effort, hard work and vision by many others. Our role is to preserve this heritage, add to it and hand on a biosphere in better shape than when we accepted our responsibility for its care and development.”*

Biosphere reserves are about developing quality economies based on local community action and entrepreneurship, sound science, public-private sector partnerships and networks, and promoting harmony between people and nature through education, conservation and sustainable activities. (extract)

Noosa Council CEO, Bruce Davidson worked on drafting this biosphere's constitution using part of the tourism model because Tourism Noosa had been a community sectoral entity before incorporating as a stand-alone company. One of the aims of Noosa Biosphere is to foster and promote symbiotic relationships between communities in the biosphere and council; for consultation and advisory considerations to flow between each and to provide council with samplings, litmus testing, opinion seeking and recommendations from the community about projects and initiatives.

Just as planning and work to establish the Noosa Biosphere was to commence, the Queensland Labour Government forced the amalgamation of local government areas across the state in 2008 - a bigger version of what the Tourism Minister had just embarked upon. Justifiable community uproar followed and many residents marched on the Premier's Office in Brisbane in resistance to what was seen as stomping on residents' rights to have their own local government representation. Carol was there.

The incorporation of a company limited by guarantee to operate as Noosa Biosphere Ltd needed Ministerial and Finance Department consent. As Noosa Shire would soon cease to exist, ownership of the organisation would be with the new regional body, Sunshine Coast Council. The new council embraced the creation of the biosphere reserve structure as recommended by the outgoing Noosa Council. The Noosa Biosphere geographic footprint remained that of the former Noosa Shire but our new remit for distribution and dissemination of outcomes was to cover the region.

Despite myth to the contrary, the new Council did not change any of the recommendations passed to it by the former Noosa Council for the biosphere entity composition and functionality. The new council dedicated resources towards the Noosa Biosphere by way of a part-time Secretariat ably staffed by Helen Gregory (administration) and Ben McMullen (science) under the wise eye of departmental director Raul Weyhardt a terrific supporter, adviser and guide on this journey. Ben was instrumental in much of the drafting of the successful UNESCO submission. In fact the submission to Paris, signed by the council, State government and Federal government was completed only one day before the changes to local government boundaries by way of forced amalgamation was ordered.

One group which was latterly part of the community representative mix involved in preparing the UNESCO submission was Noosa Parks Association (NPA). I am told they expected to be the *community* organisation awarded operational control of the

biosphere structure if the submission was successful. It was, but they were not appointed.

Why council left them out is unknown but conditions on sectoral membership excluded special interest groups with one exception, Tourism Noosa. It has been hinted NPA's practices and methods of operation left something to be desired. Years later, investigative reporting by the Courier Mail newspaper seems to add credence to this view.

In supreme confidence of being directly appointed biosphere warden NPA formed a structure to accept the biosphere challenge. Years later Noosa Biosphere Association (NBA) sat forlornly bereft of any noteworthy effort with which to challenge the outstanding achievements of the official UNESCO Noosa Biosphere Ltd. Technically, there is no impediment to any other organisation working independently towards Man and Biosphere goals within the Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Instead of challenging through demonstrated good works and achievement, NPA became rock throwers against any and all achievements of the community based Noosa Biosphere Ltd.

Even so, when NBA was to go into voluntary liquidation in 2015, Cr Playford seemed to give the organisation some official biosphere standing which it just didn't have and never earned.

Noosa Biosphere Ltd came into being on 16 December 2008.

We issued a brief to create a logo capturing Noosa and Biosphere in one. The successful submission used Noosa's emblem flower, the *Boronia Keysii*, stylised within a three-dimensional sphere matrix representing the interwoven elements of our biosphere – the many into one. The design was a popular choice.

I wrote a paper proposing the logo be used on all official street signage to reinforce one's presence within the biosphere boundaries and to promote front-of-mind recall across the community. The new amalgamated council didn't take up the idea but perhaps the new de-amalgamated Noosa Council might eventually give it some further thought.

Tourism Noosa was appointed official marketer of biosphere experiences to visitors. Tourism Noosa was entitled to a seat on the biosphere board through the inherited mechanism of long-standing sectoral engagement. The overlap between these organisations linked tourism marketing of the biosphere experience with the necessity to conserve, preserve and sustain UNESCO's Man and Biosphere principles. Sustainability in partnership.

This didn't please NPA whose officially nominated *provocateur*, Tony Wellington, regularly attacked me in an electronic newsletter called *Gum Shoe*. We renamed it *Gum Boot* as it was heavy on spreading mud through rumour and innuendo. People like Tony Wellington, Bruce Cresswell and others used print and copious emails to disseminate petty minded smear tactics not dissimilar to those of McCarthyism.

Who was it who said? *'The receptive capability of the masses is limited, their understanding small. On the other hand they have a great power of forgetting. When you lie tell big lies. In the primitive simplicity of their minds they fall victims to the big lie more readily than to the small lie.'*

As a public figure I had to take it on the chin although I wrote regularly to the community newspapers correcting the more outrageous statements. I was given fair representation. Tony went on to be elected as a councillor of the restored new Noosa Shire representing the NPA/NBA agenda.

Bob Abbot tells a tale about meeting Cresswell for the first time at one of popular Raul Weychardt's retirement drinks functions. Bob knew about Cresswell's media and letter attacks and observed Bruce hovering just outside the circles of those talking to the former Sunshine Coast Mayor, and soon to be deputy mayor of the new Noosa council. Seeing an opportunity to inject himself into the group Bruce stepped forward and, as Bob tells it said, "You don't know me. I am Br..." Bob's quick retort was, "and let's keep it that way." With that Bob turned and walked away leaving Bruce Cresswell standing red-faced in the midst of some very amused people.

I had observed the interaction from just outside the group and delighted in the immediate retelling of the exact details by Bob to me moments after the exchange. Bob had great delight in roaming the room and relating the encounter to others who had experienced Cresswell's vitriol over the years. We all had a good chuckle.

Those in the know, regard NPA's attitude as spiteful and childish. I see it as lost opportunity to develop something great in a different but beneficial way for overall community good. I recall having coffee with NPA representatives on Gympie Terrace to see if there was mutual ground. Their demands were unrealistic. Nothing less than control, which I couldn't grant, was acceptable. Noosa Biosphere had a public consultation management plan which our challengers were prepared to discard in exclusive favour of their unspecified agenda. Give me a break!

Groups like the Noosa Independence Alliance and *Friends of Noosa* were soon formed to fight the fight for de-amalgamation. Led by Jim Berardo, Bob Ansett, Joanne Wright and others its purpose was admirable and just. But, the de-amalgamation camp also aligned with Noosa Parks Association. A clique of Tourism Noosa directors comprising Rick Cooper, Boyd Williams, Geoff Rickard and Jane Fraser wanted Tourism Noosa to come out in open support of de-amalgamation. I sought legal advice as to the risks inherent in this approach and was able to hold off their efforts until my third term as chair finished.

Kicking and screaming, Noosa Shire had been amalgamated with the other southern shires to form the massive Sunshine Coast Council. Our popular local mayor Bob Abbot was easily elected as the first regional mayor. However Noosa felt badly done by because it only had two elected councillors out of a dozen representing all communities. The old parochial dislikes came home to roost with much conspiracy theory and rumour feeding emotions and clouding clearer thinking. How many times do our emotions override better judgment?

Because of what was now being revealed at TSC, and through Benny Pike's letter for change, the new council appointed the

Tourism Transition Advisory Board (TTAB), chaired by lawyer Michael Arnett, to come up with a better model for regional tourism; a model which offered competitive advantage from a merging of resources and funding over the past crippled practice. Steve Cooper and I were able to influence the choice of the consultant to carry out the development of this plan for the new body in consultation with all parties. He was Albert Stafford with whom I had worked years before on various diagnostics and plans under the *AusIndustry* program.

The detail of the history of the amalgamation and its unravelling will be written about by others but what is of consequence to my story is the far reaching and ultimately damaging changes to tourism. The damage was not intended, far from it. Many positives were expected to come from the proposed bottom-up consultative and partnering structure from the efforts of the TTAB. The operating structure developed was designed around recommendations from Stafford and agreed to by all the regional LTOs.

Basically TTAB proposed, based on Stafford's report, the new body called Sunshine Coast Destination Ltd (SCDL) would have four satellites to connect with tourism interests across what is a large area. Tourism Noosa was to be the northern hub with options to link to Gympie, Cooloola and Fraser Coast and by agreement to build a tourism eco-zone across both biospheres and World Heritage Fraser Island.

Steve, Albert and I did a huge amount of work on structure, operational guidelines and details of just how the bottom-up design would work. Albert got everyone to sign off on the process and broad concept although conditions around the progression to the ultimate structure became a sticking point with the TTAB by a segment of the Tourism Noosa board.

I believe the implementation of the final operational plan fell apart through arrogance and ego of the new SCDL. Here was a structure, agreed to by all main participants, which the new CEO and board, under Chair Julie-Anne Schafer, decided to

change unilaterally. In my opinion, a case of smart people doing a stupid thing.

So, what had transpired between my initially raising concerns about TSCs adequacy to manage regional tourism and the formation of the TTAB?

Pressure was brought to bear on TSC to voluntarily move towards closure and transition to the new structure. Under pressure the TSC CEO John Fitzgerald and Chair David Aaron departed. While Graeme Pearce replaced David Aaron as TSC chair, I had asked Bruce Davidson the former CEO of Noosa Council to stand for the role but his personal retirement plans did not permit this at the time.

None of the interested parties wanted a new TSC chair or CEO appointed with imminent closure forecast but elements of the TSC board resisted. The TSCs financial partners and Council favoured the TSC deputy-chair taking the helm and for an interim CEO to step into Fitzgerald's shoes while the transition was accomplished. Alas, unfortunately, David Aaron appointed the TQ representative director Leanne Coddington to head a nominations committee to select a new chair.

Every time the board interviewed a candidate it was done under a fierce objection to process by half of the directors. If we had refused to participate, Aaron had a one vote majority to appoint directly if he wanted too. But when the recommendation of Pearce's candidacy was presented, the board locked 50/50. Still determined not to facilitate an easy transition, Aaron used his casting vote to make the appointment and resigned as chairman.

Pearce took over a divided board and immediately went ahead to appoint a new CEO in Russell Mason who had no real future and whose employment contract was kept secret from the board until Pearce was forced to table it due to the legal implications of engaging the most senior manager without a budget provision to pay for the role beyond a certain date. I stepped off the TSC board in protest.

I had first met Graeme when I was running the Brisbane bureau. I found him to be an obdurate fellow. Russell Mason replaced John Fitzgerald as CEO. So sure was Pearce TSC would not only survive but dominate as Tourism Queensland's lap dog all negotiations to reform TSC stalled. Noosa declined to contribute any future funding, instead opting to use the funds to expand our successful campaigns.

Although now not a director, I was nominated by three of the four regional tourism bodies, Caloundra siding with TSC, to press Pearce and Mason to see sense and realise the weight of resistance to any survival of TSC. Pearce showed for coffee alone. After nearly two hours he walked away reissuing the challenge for us to try to replace TSC. The gloves came off and sufficient voices from the tourism industry basically issued a 'kill' order on TSC.

Soon after I had to warn off Russell Mason about comments he had made to a group of members about me. I asked for and got an apology from Pearce, but not from Mason, over the matter.

Tourism Noosa held fast to its denial of funds until the very end. Council's finance director Greg Laverty asked us to cough up a small amount of bridging finance in exchange for a credit with council in the next financial year. I felt it was expeditious to do it and agreed under a delegated authority I had obtained from the board to facilitate all negotiations during the period. Some on the board disagreed with the funding decision even though it was primarily for payroll of employees who were not to blame for other's errors in judgment. I had a clear conscience Tourism Noosa had done the right thing for the right reasons.

TSC closed and Sunshine Coast Destination Ltd was created with a new board and CEO. Russell Mason was a casualty along with Pearce. Talk about wrongly reading the tea leaves. I had met with Graham twice warning him of the risks.

Based on the Stafford Report negotiated option, approved by the TTAB, the organisational construct of SCDL initially allowed for each sub-region to maintain established brand independence; play an active part in overall strategy development and provide

a range of services to deliver the interface between tourists and operators thereby maintaining quality service contact. All good on paper. Tragically for tourism it didn't work due to fiddling with the agreed model. The old animosities surfaced and, coupled with poor leadership by the new SCDL board, the body went through its first two CEOs in a flash.

Maintaining brand independence was critical for Tourism Noosa because its brand economic benefit was edging towards a billion dollars annually within five years. The Noosa brand anchored the overall Sunshine Coast holiday reputation. Tourism Noosa wasn't about to hand it over to people who frankly didn't understand how it had been created or how to build it further and maintain its pre-eminence.

The immediate and on-going dysfunction of Sunshine Coast Destination Ltd gave no-one confidence. This disquiet, fed by some, gave ample ammunition to conspiracy theorists SCDL and Council could not be trusted. The conspiracy theorists just replaced the TTAB with SCDL, added Council back into the mix and reconstructed their paranoia.

On his own admission Steve Cooper was a willing activist in feeding and feeding-off the rumour mill. Logic has little chance against emotional decision-making because such individuals have a strong psychological need for belief validation so they seek out what supports their proposition. Over half of the Tourism Noosa board sat in this hole.

One example of what I was contending with is worth relating. The Tourism Noosa publicist, Di Ainsworth, and CEO Steve Cooper telephoned me excitedly one morning to say they had definite proof TTAB and Council were moving to close Tourism Noosa down as a part of establishing SCCDL. Apart from trying to starve us into submission through withholding our tourism operator-based levy funds collected by council, why would they want to damage the third largest tourism brand in the State? Not impossible, but an unbelievably stupid and economically damaging act, so very unlikely.

Both Di and Steve believed they had proof the CEO and the Director of Finance of Council had told others of the plan to shut down Tourism Noosa. Steve had called a meeting of the Governance Committee made up of me, Steve, Rick Cooper, Boyd Williams and Stephen Ferrigno. Ferrigno wasn't available. We were to meet at a local coffee shop close to the Tourism Noosa offices at the Tewantin Marina.

Their 'proof' came through third party eavesdropping, wildly open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. However, to a clutch of avid conspiracy theorists it was the goddamn true evidence needed to up the battle to a war footing against the two organisations who had demonstrably not been our enemies during any of the negotiations.

Nothing was substantiated or able to be because the so-called source had to be protected. I let the animated exchange across the table get to a point where they started to formulate *DefCon4* options. I took out my mobile and dialled John Knaggs, Council CEO. He had Greg Laverty, the finance director in his office waiting for the call.

I had rung them both independently as I drove to the emergency council-of-war meeting. The rumour was just that and nothing more. The theorists had no real factual assurance whatever. Understandably, both of these professionals were insulted and furious at the lack of trust in their intentions. The conference call was short, blunt, with a denial in writing offered but an apology also asked for in the strongest terms. The issue collapsed with much chagrin.

This silliness was to be regularly repeated with this cluster and too many others, who never seemed to learn to ask questions first before hitting a panic button. Badly done by through amalgamation, about to be done over through threatened assimilation and paralysed by what might be rather than determining the truth or taking steps to control outcomes instead of just defensively reacting to them. A loss of courage is a failure which will cripple a business. Fascinating.

I am reminded here the medical profession teaches interns to look for the obvious rather than the unlikely. The dictum is “*if you hear hoof beats, think horses not zebras.*” In the tourism corollary I had people painting horses with stripes to validate their fears.

I kept backdoor access open to Stafford as the transition from the TTAB group to the new SCDL was effected. Steve and I were negotiating the Tourism Noosa Service Agreement through Albert to the TTAB. When it came down to the wire, Tourism Noosa was being required to take a decision to its membership, at the next AGM, to merge with SCDL. My board and I would not agree.

Albert warned a circuit breaker was needed otherwise what the clique on the Tourism Noosa board feared most would become a self-fulfilling prophecy created by obstinacy. I had to break this group’s *only play to win a ‘no’ card* mindset. I had read where game strategy suggests that to *play to a stalemate* is a sound middle-ground defensive option.

As I didn’t know whom I could trust on the board, along with my assessment the CEO had aligned with the conspiracy theorists, so I worked alone. The proposition I was constructing offered the TTAB a way to virtually complete all the service agreements on deadline but with one exception, ours. TTAB would have to defer any final decision over Tourism Noosa to SCDL. Any burden of proof scenario could only be met by SCDL.

Simply, I argued the new structure was unproven and therefore an unacceptable risk for Tourism Noosa to consider a merger of interests until the new model’s operational effectiveness and efficiency could be assessed. How could we risk the livelihood of several hundreds of members along with such huge brand equity on an unproven structure and theoretical relationship construct despite my being one of the designers. I sought and gained Albert Stafford’s support for the argument. I then unwrapped my thinking to the TN board.

In support of the idea, I drew on Albert Stafford’s own observations about Tourism Noosa. In his report Albert detailed a number of points for TN being the model example for the way

in which SCDL should operate. Albert stated Tourism Noosa could challenge any regional tourism organisation in Australia for efficiency and effectiveness; on performance output to size it ranked third in the world and, as a model, a new regional body should either emulate Tourism Noosa or the new body should be Tourism Noosa.

This last option, for us to morph into the new regional body, was ignored as an option by management and board despite it being a valid defensive alternative. When considered alongside the strong de-amalgamation push, the option isn't as attractive so it wasn't given much air. However, in first proposing this option sometime earlier, purely as an alternative for consideration, I knew, from Albert and Mayor Bob Abbot, no change or too small a change regionally risked the Minister and TQ taking action by withdrawing access to co-op funding for big marketing campaigns.

Of fourteen RTOs, nine were financially non-viable. Projecting Tourism Noosa into the lead regional role, following the state Tourism Network Review which supported Stafford's recommendations, would merge sufficient interests and budgets to allow the Sunshine Coast, under its already established and strong sub-brands, to leverage marketing opportunities to a new level. Tourism Noosa needed to be seen as coming along on the journey by at least discussing such alternatives.

Our new *proof of concept* proposition was well argued both strategically and legally. It proposed a three-year window for establishment before testing the success or otherwise of SCDL. Milestones were to be met by both sides towards a vote by our Tourism Noosa members before any radical change.

The board approved the document's release. I arranged for Albert Stafford to receive the proposition on behalf of the TTAB as it was with the TTAB Albert and I wanted this transition document executed, not SCDL who could be less in favour of Tourism Noosa standing alone in the mix of arrangements. No other sub-region would have this privilege. When the other regional bodies

found out they went ballistic but the TTAB held and only considered the Noosa proposition.

Carol and I had planned a break to the Gold Coast. I left CEO Cooper to print the approved text for the Deputy Chair to sign. Without fellow director agreement the clique redrafted the text into a threat which conformed to their *play to win a 'no' card* and emailed it to Stafford. Albert called me and said the letter wasn't what was expected. It was deemed *argumentum ad nauseum* and would result in '*the Tourism Noosa problem*' being shunted onto the SCDL board agenda where we would lose any window to negotiate. I acted nonplussed and asked for a copy. The conference call to the others which followed could have melted the mobile phones involved.

Within hours I had a retraction and the original reinstated and sent. The proper proposition was endorsed by the TTAB and our Service Level Agreement amended and signed. Tourism Noosa had been bought a three-year period of grace. I had successfully aligned any membership based merger decision to coincide with the anticipated community decision to de-amalgamate Noosa.

Now what only few know is the TTAB through Albert wanted only two years grace. I was asked to make a few minor drafting amendments. I purposely didn't and left it at three. Fully expecting the item to be picked up and changed, I was stunned when it went through.

On the night the document was endorsed the TTAB board met at the Noosa Surf Life Saving Club. It was a Tourism Noosa Members Night evening and the night of a wild storm. Even so, this did not deter over half of the membership attending their monthly meeting to hear firsthand what decision had been made. *Friends of Noosa* (FoN) were also represented as Jim Berardo and Bob Ansett were affiliated with Tourism Noosa via the Hastings Street Association (HSA) which represented some of the businesses in that famous concourse.

Prior to the night in question, Jim Berardo and I had had some telephone conversations over the matter. Well, Jim yelled and

cursed something fearful at me so it was pretty much a one-sided message. Again, the same position of *only play to win a 'no'* was the theme.

The packed room hushed as I took the microphone to announce the three-year grace period with all operational authority preserved but with an obligation to engage towards the overall aim of greater marketing potential. There was great applause. I offered to answer questions first requesting speakers introduce themselves and their representative organisations so the audience could be informed.

Bob Ansett was first to take the mike and launched into a political speech about Noosa independence. I asked him to stop and to introduce himself. Truthfully, there was probably not a single person in the room who didn't know who Bob Ansett was. He hesitated then did so and continued his diatribe. Once more I stopped him and asked for his affiliation. Again, he hesitated then complied and continued speaking. I stopped him again and asked for his question. A furtive glance around the quiet room told him he was testing audience patience.

Bob asked, "Was Tourism Noosa being forced to merge?" and "Was Tourism Noosa's marketing independence and brand preserved?" I said truthfully, "No and Yes" to the questions. Bob replied, "I do not believe that." Upon which two of the TTAB directors, Greg Laverty and Tony Hanmer, spoke in unison and said what I had confirmed was correct. Applause erupted again.

Bob handed the microphone to Jim Berardo who prefaced the same questions with, "I want to be sure you are understanding what is being asked." He repeated the questions. To which I responded again, "Yes, all is preserved and we have three years to test the new model before putting a decision to our membership for them to decide further options," to which Greg Laverty of Sunshine Coast Council stepped forward again adding, "And it is in writing in the Service Level Agreement." Jim pushed and demanded to review the documentation. Frustrated with the open lack of trust being exhibited, Tony

Hanmer, again joined the discourse with “You’ve won all you wished for, be satisfied?”

From the audience a voice replied, “Shit! Jim, give it a rest.” The audience was not on Ansett or Berardo’s side. The meeting ended and celebratory drinks were ordered. Bob and Jim walked out to several unkind remarks from the sidelines. We had achieved what was thought impossible.

The Service Level Agreement was regarded as a commercial-in-confidence document of the Tourism Noosa board. Despite this and several years of governance education from me, Jim had a copy by next day because it served a purpose to destabilise. The hard-copy source was virtually untraceable. Jim didn’t like the agreement, citing poor drafting. I have to agree. This was done on purpose to afford further ways in which to challenge enforceability if needed. I had used pressure of time to avoid any further delays by having it go to lawyers for a polish which may have trapped Tourism Noosa.

Throughout all of the machinations over the future of TSC, the TTAB and Tourism Noosa, I had concerns privileged documents and correspondence were being shared inappropriately between members of our board and outside players thereby complicating and compromising dealings and initiatives. To track emails I subscribed to a trace service called *didtheyreadit.com*. I told no-one about this and used what it revealed to my negotiating advantage.

Knowing to whom stuff was being forwarded provided me with a way to target certain parties with misdirection when it suited our purposes.

Unfortunately, two years of the three-year period of grace the deal brought was frittered away in unnecessary politicking and *business-as-usual* arrogance once I was off the board. Tourism Noosa appear to have played close to FoN and NPA refusing to use the biosphere opportunity to reinvigorate Noosa’s image and drive critically needed new economic benefit to its members.

Steve Cooper had Noosa Biosphere discussion papers which showed job creation opportunities, new business opportunities and a whole new level of experiential services associated with biosphere status. Instead, Tourism Noosa, as the designated Northern Destination Desk of SCDL, refused to take advantage due to certain parties placing obstacles in the way of partnering with Noosa Biosphere.

In hindsight, I also probably spooked influential sectoral interests in Hastings Street by daring to raise the spectre of potential risk to low-lying Noosa from Climate Change. Noosa had been identified internationally by UNESCO as one of a handful of global locations at risk of rising sea levels in the coming decades. Noosa Biosphere Reserve's own climate planning had identified the same risk and lecturer content at University of the Sunshine Coast also pointed to the effect of longer periods of drought, followed by much heavier rainfall, soaring temperatures, storms fronts and the risk of tidal surge and inundation. A global insurance outlook report had a similar message. Our own Federal government report of the day estimates over one billion dollars of infrastructure and buildings could be affected.

So my proposal to 'float' conversations about looking forward and considering the economic, social and community impacts sponsored by biosphere and tourism seemed prescient.

I proposed briefing Tourism Noosa members, key players in business especially the real estate sector and politicians. Well, the ostriches went ape-shit. I was accused of scare-tactics to push the Noosa Biosphere Reserve agenda. I knew the Gold Coast had already identified similar issues but had maturely included it in planning conference agendas and had the issue out in the open. No so Noosa. I was becoming seen as radically dangerous by some quarters.

As it turns out by late 2014, the new Noosa Council had announced that residents living in designated areas, expected to be affected by rising sea levels of up to 0.8m, would have to build

higher starting at 0.3m and progress up to the forecast 0.8m by 2100 when rainfall intensity was expected to have increased by some twenty percent thereby exacerbating flooding when combined with storm surge and new sea levels. By 2015 the potential threat was more openly acknowledged. I hated being right on this issue.

A year after the creation of the Noosa Biosphere in 2007, Great Sandy Biosphere also achieved UNESCO recognition. This second Queensland biosphere abuts Noosa Biosphere Reserve and we both sit alongside World Heritage Fraser Island. This creates one of the most environmentally rich and diverse natural eco-zones on the continent. You could not ask for such a wonderful gift and expect more than Noosa Biosphere. Still this wonderland was ignored by tourism for two years. An obscene waste of economic opportunity for members of Tourism Noosa.

Even when Noosa Biosphere was confirmed as the venue for the 2011 Healthy Cities Conference, Tourism Noosa didn't take up the economic opportunities offered to its membership from the two-hundred and fifty plus delegates. Peter Sugg helped Noosa Biosphere win this event. I had MC'd the 2010 event in Brisbane for Peter's company. and contributed to the 2007 Urban Design Conference on the Gold Coast where I had the opportunity to share a drink and chat with Michael Sorkin, brother of screen writer Aaron Sorkin of *The West Wing* fame.

My Noosa Biosphere Chair Report of July 2010 outlined a series of opportunities offered to tourism by Noosa's biosphere designation. These included using Queensland's first two biospheres (Noosa and Great Sandy) as *cross-border* competitive differentiators of 'place' along with World Heritage Fraser Island; creating new revenue streams for members based on elements of sustainable biosphere experiences (intrinsically Australian nature-based product elements); accessing new government grant programs to refresh and renew infrastructure through upgrades and refurbishment (including airport facilities, communications and roads). Capital works initiatives

formed long-term hard infrastructure for touring and access to remote and special areas.

Biosphere status offered Noosa huge opportunities to refresh, change and to provide a renewed experience. I believe the retail and restaurant mix in Hastings Street had lost its way. There is little different from competitor locations. What was a unique Noosa retail feel needs to return. Excellence in service just isn't as good as it should be. I am reminded about the observation "*service is the inconvenience between me finding out what you want and my giving you the bill.*"

At the time we also had advantages because Queensland Parks policy had just changed to allow greater low-impact nature-based access. This plus a new set of sustainability guidelines were being prepared by the government agency DEEDI (Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation) for Queensland nature-based tourism organisations. Noosa had the opportunity to become the centre for a new icon eco-zone. Simultaneously, Tourism Australia commenced rolling out its Australian National Landscape Program which links nature-based experiences to a new era of *voluntourism* initiatives.

I called for a Working Group between biosphere and tourism towards creating a mutually desired and balanced future. Tourism Noosa sat on its hands offering the excuse they were primarily a marketing organisation and not a product development agency. The outcome a few years down the track is very few 'must do' new experiences based on biosphere have been initiated.

Without me as a driver, the cross-over benefits hoped for between tourism and biosphere slowed down and eventually stalled. I came to suspect Steve, as CEO, was playing a game to curry favour with the Tourism Noosa's dominant clique. The biosphere board approved a series of innovative job-creating tourism based initiatives, none of which were translated into outcomes by Steve while he was with Tourism Noosa. Although to be fair, once Steve stepped away from of his tourism role he went back onto the Noosa Biosphere board and was one of

the champions of an initiative to create a biosphere *Institute for Sustainability*.

At one stage, out of frustration, I even proposed to the Noosa Biosphere board we should remove Tourism Noosa from its sector board status and replace it with an industry-based new advisory group to get the relationship motivated. There wasn't the stomach for such a radical initiative.

With a change of guard at Tourism Noosa in 2012, which I will detail shortly, I still pushed from retirement for Tourism Noosa and Noosa Biosphere to work closer together. The opportunities biosphere offers tourism start with tourism moving away from being a commodity based on price to a true experiential choice differentiated by quality, variety and uniqueness.

To achieve the breathing space from TTAB I had pushed hard and driven a tense agenda with my fellow directors. Despite the successful outcomes I was a marked man. The AGM of 2010 would require me to stand for renomination and election. Steve Cooper wanted me to stay another year but, what was now a cabal, played their hand. I was asked not to stand and for the role to pass seamlessly to the deputy chair Geoff Rickard.

A couple of months before I met privately with Geoff and asked him to step aside allowing Sheraton's Stephen Ferrigno to be nominated in his stead. I explained based on his performance at meetings, and critical observations from other directors, there was good reason to ask him to step aside. In fact, Geoff had told me the year before to tap him on the shoulder if he reached his use-by-date. When time came he refused to budge. He certainly had little grasp of potential new opportunities ahead. He got support to stay in the role because others saw an opportunity to influence a malleable chairman and to take Tourism Noosa on a less than neutral course as part of de-amalgamation. They wanted to have a fight.

At the board meeting following the AGM I spoke against Geoff Rickard's candidacy giving compelling reasons and making a prediction. My words made no difference and their man was elected.

The requirement for the chair to be independent was dispensed with. Within a year my prediction manifested itself to the businesses' cost.

Steve Cooper sought my counsel to talk through his interest in the recently vacated CEO role at SCDL. He had also had enough of the antics of the cabal. Perhaps one of the architects of the proposed regional model could repair and sort out the regional debacle. SCDL had had two CEOs in just over a year along with much destabilising board turmoil resulting in the chair resigning and Eumundi local, Barry Adams, assuming the chairmanship.

I had a number of opportunities to watch Barry in action. Despite his corporate regulatory background and obvious governance knowledge I was not impressed with his chairmanship style or meeting management.

I warned Steve his own hands-on style of leadership and small-business management practices would need to adapt to a much larger organisational framework. Plus the relationship between directors and the CEO would be very different at SCDL given the personalities involved.

Steve wanted the SCDL role. He appeared increasingly disaffected with the goings on at Tourism Noosa. I made a couple of calls and positioned Steve as the front runner with Adams and Council. Council had initially made it clear no-one associated with the previous regional tourism bodies would be considered for a role on the SCDL board or for employment, such was the mistrust. Thankfully, over time, this has changed.

Steve got the job. A bit over a year later the SCDL board acted to remove him. This made four CEOs who had fallen – Fitzgerald, Mason, Denton and Cooper plus three chairs. As a consequence of this internal turmoil SCDL then lost a slew of their best people. A new CEO from Western Australia, Simon Ambrose took over and chair Barry Adams exited. Four chairs in about three years.

Steve believed he pushed too hard for the bottom-up TTAB model over the SCDL variation which was control and dominate from above. And of course, there was a completely different style

of board with some interesting opinionated personalities and strong egos. I think he might have had challenges coming to grips with an organisation which was bigger than Tourism Noosa and with a more complex hierarchical structure needing a different leadership style.

In parallel with the regional dysfunction, the new regime at Tourism Noosa removed certain governance safeguards, the chair was no longer independent, also the operating style of the newly elected chair was to become executive through direct involvement in management decisions, the CEO role was redesignated General Manager and internally appointed without competitive applications being called and considered, plus questionable contract deals done. Morale plummeted.

I am reliably informed by some who were present eventually a point was reached where the four leaders of the cabal were challenged by the other directors. They pushed back. In doing so they put an ultimatum to the board to back off or they would walk. Surprise! The walk offer was accepted. Member Steve McFarlane was elected the new Chair. Steve had been deputy CEO at Best Western under Rodger Powell, who was also on the board of SCDL. I know! I know!

Damien Massingham replaced the former contract PR Manager, Di Ainsworth, who had been appointed General Manager, Tourism Noosa under a deal brokered by Chairman Rickard.

Now back to biosphere development. During the early months of the unwanted council amalgamation, between March and December 2008, I worked with Raul, Helen, Ben of the transitioning Noosa Council and shared progress with John Knaggs, CEO Sunshine Coast Council on designing sector board 'charters', organisational processes and policies, early communication and branding protocols, board skill-set analysis, constitutional refinements, the approvals process and incorporation.

Along with each board charter pro-forma I created a simple course on good committee chairmanship and meeting protocols. We held a dinner for the respective sectoral chairpersons,

walked them through the pointers and made sure their specific sector processes provided for good agenda management. Time and agenda management were not hallmarks of my successor as chair.

Between July and October 2008, I facilitated community and sector board meetings seeking input from many towards operational standards, communication outreach to residents once we were incorporated and to involve as many people as possible in the implementation of biosphere operations. Council never interfered, directed or instructed although I kept them informed by face-to-face meetings with CEO Knaggs and Mayor Abbot. We were just told to get on with it and to make it work for the whole region. At the end of all of this consultation period the initial draft of the *Plan of Management to 2012* took shape as a community-of-interest generated document.

The constitutional framework for the biosphere had been first drafted by Noosa Council CEO Bruce Davidson. It provided for a strong two-way communication between sector boards and council departments. That mechanism regrettably fell away under the amalgamation despite our best efforts to make it happen. We were up against a new council, new staff and a new executive whose attentions were naturally elsewhere during the first two years of the amalgamation.

It was a proud day for all involved when we held the inaugural governance board meeting and for me especially to be confirmed as inaugural UNESCO Noosa Man and Biosphere Chair. The meeting took place on Tuesday, 9 December 2008. We did a *rehearsal run* in the presence of an audience from all of the sector boards on 11 November to familiarise all participants with the process and their roles. All governance board meetings were open to the public.

One of our great supporters Christie Fellows passed away the next week. A sad occasion for this young mother's family and her many biosphere friends. So it was a pleasure to establish an annual youth award in her honour and in Christie's name some time later.

Noosa Biosphere Ltd had, in effect, a 'group mind' representing the wider community through the engagement across some seventy plus persons. This head-count includes representation from the sixty members of the various sectors boards at any one time. These boards are not a legal construct but voluntary assemblies matched to skill-sets in and around the particular sector e.g. economics or culture. There is also the eleven-member board and the two-person, part-time Secretariat.

Noosa Biosphere operated a bottom-up model of community involvement. Volunteered time saw a return on investment from Council's annual funding support grow from 27c per \$1 of council funds to \$1.20 per \$1, in four years. By its nature and necessity the inaugural chairmanship was a de facto executive role with the support of the Secretariat. I took on the workload enthusiastically.

Sector board vacancies are filled twice yearly as needed from public solicitation of volunteers with appropriate backgrounds. Noosa Biosphere eventually received many more applications to fill slots than there were vacancies. The qualifications and the experience of participants across this extensive talent pool were extraordinary. All time is volunteered.

The original model, unchanged and inherited from the former Noosa Shire, returned to the fold from 1st January 2014. In an historic community vote, the re-establishment of the former much loved Noosa Shire was confirmed in November 2013.

One thing I made sure was a carry forward agenda item for the governance board was the interest from surrounding hinterland residents to have their areas included into an expanded biosphere foot print. Initially tabled by director Peter Homan, GM of the Original Eumundi Markets, we engaged with each community on how to do it once de-amalgamation was achieved and if that didn't happen to initiate boundary changes by them applying for inclusion anyway. I put a lot of time into attending local meetings to consult with residents on the why and how. More on this later.

UNESCO grants Man and Biosphere status for ten years. A requirement in year one is for a management plan to be developed and provided to the Paris office. This we did and from that 2009 plan came a string of initiatives. Some examples are:

- ◆ *Noosa Biosphere Festival involving over 100 community groups and attended by thousands of residents;*
- ◆ *A substantial Climate Action Plan done in partnership with leading environmental agencies and declared by UNESCO as one of the top thirty across the global biosphere network. UNESCO subsequently published the report and distributed it globally;*
- ◆ *Partnership with Sunshine Coast Council on a business energy consumption improvement program titled EcoBiz;*
- ◆ *Hosting and education of hundreds of international students who visited the Noosa Biosphere and who have contributed over a million dollars so far into our local economy;*
- ◆ *Active partnerships with trade and learning institutions, government scientific agencies, universities and associations, resulting in formal recognition of some two dozen or so Partner organisations between 2011 and 2014;*
- ◆ *A further fifty initiatives at grass-roots level across South-East Queensland;*
- ◆ *Proposal to establish an Australian Biosphere Network to lobby government;*
- ◆ *Benchmarking studies into the State of the Biosphere to monitor progress towards renewal in a decade's time;*
- ◆ *Disaster and Emergency Planning Workshops for the public given Noosa being identified as subject to climate change effects of tide and swell;*
- ◆ *Working directly with biospheres in Canada, Cambodia, Vietnam, Peru, China, UK and Hawaii and hosting visits by over a dozen delegations from other countries;*

- ◆ *Partnership with the Noosa Community Environment Trust towards acquisition of conservation land and other natural conservation and preservation projects;*
- ◆ *Hosting national and international conferences aligned with biosphere principles;*
- ◆ *Publications, lecture notes and presentations for re-use by others in support of the Noosa Biosphere Reserve;*
- ◆ *An information and educational DVD titled 'Biosphere' in co-operation with the Noosa Federation of the Arts. UNESCO was particularly taken with this creation by the Noosa Federation of the Arts and Noosa Biosphere Ltd. (I had an initial rocky relationship, through a misunderstanding, with the NFA chair Meg Lawrence but eventually we became good friends and worked with a common purpose to grow the influence of culture across the fledgling biosphere.)*

A personal initiative of mine was the creation of a special account called the *eFund* standing for Entrepreneurial Fund. This fund's purpose was to preserve unexpended funds or generated income towards topping up special projects, encouraging partnerships and / or a fund of last resort for projects to take them successfully over the line. This has been incredibly useful and practical.

In October 2011 the world head of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere program, Dr Natarajan Ishwaran (*call me Ish*) came to Noosa. Ish was impressed with progress and observed in just three years we were exhibiting a biosphere structural maturity and project development normally only seen in eight or nine year old locations. The team was very proud. His words spurred them on to even greater engagement.

Gum Boot & Co complained to Ish about the unfairness of them being left out. He too said a parallel biosphere supportive group was not without merit or possibility if they had alternative ideas or methodologies and community support. I had not prepped him. Of course they did nothing to take up the challenge except buy more stones.

I also made sure UNESCO's Dr Ish knew about the push for a Noosa Biosphere boundary change. He was supportive of any application from the residents of Eumundi, Verrierdale and Doonan, known as the EDV Group, to Noosa Biosphere requesting inclusion and for the Noosa Biosphere boundary to be changed to include them. Noosa Biosphere would need to endorse the initiative, have Council also endorse it and for the variation to be put through channels. I informed the residents' representatives and encouraged them to start the process. Despite this and due to influence from the opponents to Noosa Biosphere Ltd they decided to hold off and to activate the initiative once the shire de-amalgamation outcome was known. I pointed out attaining or being in the process of inclusion within an enlarged Noosa Biosphere Reserve boundary would assist their case for also becoming part of the new Noosa Shire Council. They ignored this advice.

As I write there is no certainty a separation of EDV from Sunshine Coast Council and merger with Noosa Shire Council will occur. The residents of EDV are openly divided and generating considerable heat. Noosa sees EDV as a marginal drain on resources probably initially, at least, likely to cost more than the area might pay in rates. They have no biosphere leverage until and unless the schism is resolved in majority favour of separation from the Sunshine Coast Council and they join Noosa; then it makes sense.

Six months after being appointed Director-General of UNESCO in November 2009, Madame Irina Bokova visited Australia as part of a world inspection of UNESCO designated areas. Based on what Ish had told her she insisted on visiting Noosa Biosphere. She, her EO, D-G Vohra, Director Pongi and UNESCO Liaison Ha Tran had a tight schedule so the minders from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade plus State government co-ordinators accompanying her entourage made our stop as almost an after-thought on the return trip from World Heritage Fraser Island. That evening Madame Bokova had a dinner engagement with the

Queensland State Governor, Ms Penelope Wensley AO, a great supporter of the environment.

Part of our tour for the D-G included a bumpy ride up to a contentious function facility owned by Philip Harding with wonderful views of the Hinterland region of the Noosa Biosphere. Madame Bokova was in her elements talking to interesting people, having aspects of the view explained to her and generally relaxing. The minders complained to me their charge needed to leave. We had just done introductions so I felt uncomfortable in closing down the event for the minders when my guest plainly had her own agenda. I quietly suggested her minders wanted to move on to our guest who smiled; winked and said "They can just wait."

Anyway some few minutes after sunset the visiting party processioned to the car park where our team were congratulated by the D-G for the effort being put into Queensland's first biosphere. As I said good-bye Madame Bokova was about to phone the Governor whom, it turned out, she knew well and felt sure all would be well for a slightly late arrival at Government House.

Obviously not happy with our management of the D-G's agenda in Noosa Biosphere, I was called by a protocol person a few days later and dressed down to which was added a complaint the bumpy road used to access the function facility had risked causing some discomfort to the guest. We knew the road needed grading and had suggested we use CRVs, to which Madame Bokova said she had travelled over worse terrain in all sorts of vehicles. If you read her background on the web, this is one tough lady who doesn't need pampering.

At Noosa Biosphere we were prepared to fight for the little guys against big business. While resources were thin we judiciously allocated people with expertise to mount challenges. One such spanned 2011/12 and was to do battle with the energy behemoth, *PowerLink*.

Two power corporations wanted to upgrade infrastructure across separate parts of the biosphere impacting sensitive species

and destroying residential amenity. *Energex* engaged with the Noosa Biosphere directly. Both they and we gave concessions and worked out how to best accomplish our respective needs. *PowerLink* on the other hand stonewalled and bullied.

I developed a four part strategy against *PowerLink* with input from the affected residents. We sourced research from our sector board members with the necessary expertise and prepared a challenge to the engineers, a modified challenge to management and a different challenge to the *PowerLink* board. Finally, a customised challenge to the Minister. Each submission ticked off specific hot-buttons.

Engineers, management and board all tossed us off so we took their responses and rewrote the ministerial correspondence. This work contained an inter-agency report from the Minister's own government as to the damage being done by utilities encroaching on sensitive environments. The report detailed the pending economic loss to tourism as the main economic driver for South East Queensland apart from the even more important and real environmental issues. So my concept of linking biosphere with tourism had a solid practical foundation.

We naturally sighted the different approach of *PowerLink's* competitor *Energex*. I laid out the case to the minister's advisers and the likely media response when we went public especially with the fact I had discovered *PowerLink* had no corporate social responsibility policy in place and just used their legislative override powers to dominate and to get their way. A few weeks later we had won our argument although *PowerLink* initially offered a deferment only, which we fought until they were directed to stop playing games by the Minister.

The Noosa Biosphere submissions even offered *PowerLink* the reasons why they needed to back out. These included proven less electricity demand than they projected and offering an alternative infrastructure carrying capacity option. Noosa Biosphere earned a lot of respect and recognition from the win. As chair it has been an exciting journey.

Two further projects of which I am personally proud are the creation of a weekly two-hour biosphere public affairs radio program on 101.3 fm Noosa Community Radio and podcasts on the www.noosabiosphere.org.au website.

I conceived the radio program as one part of the overall communication strategy. We needed to get our biosphere message across to the community; radio was a good option. It was a terrific experience to be trained as your own technician, researcher and presenter. Training covers nine weeks of technical proficiency plus separate sessions of legal study due to our strict laws for interview certification. Over ten people have followed in my footsteps to provide a roster of on-air presenters. The program is very professionally co-hosted.

Voices of the Biosphere (VoB) did just that. It gave a voice to hundreds of interviewees to speak about their community, their activities and their wishes. We don't know of any other biosphere with its own dedicated radio program. It is believed to be unique in the global biosphere family.

Locally *Voices of the Biosphere* became very well regarded. Originally only an hour, I was asked by the station to make it a two-hour slot due to the program's popularity. The show is repeated weekly in a different time slot to expand its audience reach. VoB is even presented live from Biosphere Festival Day and the local agricultural show. I tried to use the radio program as a neutral platform to exchange views and opinions with a broad audience. We invited all manner of friend and foe to voice opinions and exchange perspectives. I worked well with the volunteers at 101.3 fm and was asked to join their board a number of times but I was over committed and Carol was pushing for me to slow down.

VoB offered in-studio live and phone-in interviews. Most took up the challenge. A few preferred to pre-record then edit. Noosa Biosphere has an affiliate pool of over two hundred groups within South Eastern Queensland listed on our website so the diversity for interviews was terrific. I believe we, I, were always

fair and balanced and often invited parties back to expand on discourse and subject-matter for our listeners. Apparently, the soon-to-be-published history of 101.3 fm recognises all of our efforts with VoB.

Unsurprisingly, one group never accepted the interview invitation which was given five times. Apparently, despite the format of fairness and even-handed interview style, Noosa Parks Association was convinced I was going to set them up on-air. They threatened me for some comments made during a program which were easy to justify broadcasting and which were not defamatory anyway. At least we then knew they listened to the broadcast each week. Ha!

Before retiring as inaugural chair I personally presented one-hundred and forty seven weekly broadcasts, interviewing some three-hundred plus people associated with our biosphere or having an interest in it or impact on it. Many of these interviews were podcast on the official website which was structured and designed by the talented crew at *PunkLogic*.

As the radio program creator I set the style which was local current affairs. I say was because when I handed the program over I suggested to the new co-presenters they consider changing the style to refresh listening audience interest. They kept the very recognisable and identifiable intro and exit music theme.

In my program format I had a very personal touch. My habit was to include a three minute classical music and opera segment wherein I told listeners something quirky about the composer or piece as a memory jog for recall if they ever heard it again. The audience loved this vignette.

Funded through a generous sponsorship from Sheraton Noosa Resort and Spa, the original Noosa Biosphere website was big. Sheraton also financially supported the set-up of VoB. In addition to the very engaging public interface of the website, the site is a central repository and access point for all communications across the biosphere sectors and our larger connectivity in south-east Queensland and beyond. The

site has undergone regular refreshment to keep it interesting. UNESCO regards our website as one of the top ten globally. As I write, this information rich resource handles sixty thousand unique hits a week. Nice!

I was disappointed when, after two years of co-operation, a segment of the indigenous community objected to what another section of their own community had approved as their own pages on the biosphere website. The debate got so heated around accuracy, interpretation and who had the ultimate authority to speak for the various clans that we removed the pages but willingly tagged them for further inclusion when the elders had sorted out differences. This never occurred despite much effort to include their representation.

The reputation of Noosa Biosphere spread internationally and in the first three years we were contacted or visited or consulted by many foreign governments and other biospheres. Some fourteen if memory serves. While all were engaging for us across many sectors of interest, one in Kep Province took me, Dr Gayle Mayes and Dr Bill Carter of University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) to Cambodia in March 2010. My relationship with USC as a speaker to several international groups, sponsored by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ran for three years.

The Cambodian Tourism Minister wanted to use the best points of Noosa to reconstruct Kep into its former glory dating from 1915. We were told the original King of the Lau Republic fell from his horse and after resting in this place remounted the saddle proceeding on his journey. This short stay founded Kep in 1590 CE. The bay was a favoured haven for pirates until 1750. The first tourist bungalows were constructed in 1917 and it became the local *French Riviera* equivalent until destroyed by the Khmer Rouge. The remaining architecture of some grand homes gives an inkling into what Kep was like in its heyday.

The assets attracting visitors over such a long period include excellent reefs for diving, seagrass beds with manatee, mangroves for fishing, a cluster and assortment of islands to visit

and national parks. In addition, local villages, salt harvesting farms and beaches offer diversity of interests for the visitor. The USC tourism team and me, representing biosphere and destination marketing, spent several days assessing potential. USC completed a Memorandum of Understanding to consult with Kep Province government and work on delivering expertise to the locals to this day.

The local government agency liaison, Sokhom, pointed out to us the challenges they faced. These range from bureaucrats building private homes inside the national park; tiger poaching, illegal tree cutting and boating in the manatee reserve; providing for better visitor safety, improved public transport and basic interpreter standards for visitors to open up the magnificent scenery, flora and fauna comprising some thirty species of birds, fantastic wild flowers and reptiles.

Not unexpectedly the locals are very adept at cooking local specialities which are popular with visitors. The restaurants should do well and, if managed properly, will have a sustainable supply of local products from the land and the sea.

Too often we take for granted that which surrounds us and which is free. The most senior representative of the Xiamen China delegation to Noosa Biosphere took me aside late in the afternoon during a smoking break for them and a coffee break for us. He had been watching a group of teenagers fish the Noosa River less than 100 metres away. The group were catching fish and enjoying a wonderful summer's day. Through the translator, our guest asked what permits did these children of local party leaders need to fish and why did they keep the fish for eating?

I explained all fishing only required a simple licence, was cheap and available to everyone and the fish were edible. Our Noosa River is of consistent high quality and two-years running gained a top river award. The translator passed on the message. He fell quiet for some time then asked me to explain again. I did so. He returned to his group and relayed the information. By my reading of their faces they found the situation surprising.

Along with meeting and greeting delegations from many countries, we also spent time with groups of teachers and students from across Australia and internationally. I developed a vision focussed upon education-tourism as a substantial new market for Noosa. Kicking off the opportunity was a big international group from the US State of Georgia. Professor Michael Tarrant, an English entrepreneurial academic, had developed educational-tourism to a high order. Over three years about one million dollars of expenditure flowed from biosphere experiences with hundreds of students visiting, staying and learning in our biosphere.

This boost to the local economy was significant and could increase to become a major economic benefit to local business if promoted and managed astutely. This was just one opportunity of over a dozen identified by Noosa Biosphere to benefit the local economy. However, to get Tourism Noosa and others involved to expand and grow the opportunities has proven to be a challenge so far.

Ben McMullen, the science adviser from the Noosa Biosphere Secretariat; Deputy Noosa Biosphere Chair Phil Moran of Noosa and District Landcare and myself with my tourism hat on, delivered lectures, gave guided tours and on-site outdoor experiences in our biosphere as part of lesson content. The content of our exchanges was meant to be captured as formal courseware to appeal to and attract even more students to our place. The future possibilities are amazing.

As an example of the silliness from the clique at Tourism Noosa towards Noosa Biosphere opportunities, tourism's new CEO, Damien Massingham, refused to take up their place chairing the Tourism Sector Board of Noosa Biosphere and the governance board directorship attached. I believe they did this to gain favour with Noosa Parks Association who desperately wanted to wrest control of the biosphere from Noosa Biosphere Ltd. Now this might seem fanciful but in the run-up to the de-amalgamation, Mayoral candidate Noel Playford was openly saying he would 'kill biosphere' shortly after gaining office. His successful efforts

in this regard were to claim a hero of the establishment of the UNESCO Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

If tourism failed as a functioning sector of Noosa Biosphere Ltd then Noosa Biosphere could be attacked later, under a new council, for a supposed inability to engage with the biggest economic sector.

When Noosa Biosphere Reserve was under the regional council's ambit Director of Finance, Greg Laverty, asked me about the relationship and actions to bring Tourism Noosa into the fold. The Noosa Biosphere board had tried several times to re-engage. Tourism Noosa steadfastly stayed at arm's length. So I put an alternate structure to the Noosa Biosphere board for a new sector board to be formed and made up of a broader constituency than just Tourism Noosa members.

We had strong participatory interest regionally but I could not get the Noosa Biosphere board to make the decision to restructure tourism representation. The disconnect around understanding biosphere was made amply clear when, two years later in 2013, Tourism Noosa made a presentation to the Noosa Biosphere board about their plans to use the biosphere to move the brand equity of Noosa from eight hundred and fifty million to one billion dollars over five years. Tourism Noosa would do this by opening up nature-based tourism but without any responsibility for sustainability of the biosphere resource. Tourism Noosa saw that as Noosa Biosphere's responsibility. They wanted to consume but not sustain.

I sat in on the presentation as an invited guest and asked the *elephant in the room question*, 'Who pays to sustain the asset of the Noosa Biosphere?' The Tourism Noosa representatives simply had no concept the biosphere asset was a finite resource requiring considered and careful management under any exploitive scheme they might have. They had a plan to use it at no cost to them or their members and had not even thought of consultation with the Noosa Biosphere as the custodians under UNESCO on behalf of the Noosa community. This awoke the Noosa Biosphere

governance board a bit to the challenges ahead. They had sat on their hands for too long and now had to face reality.

At the time, I knew the Tourism Noosa business plan did not contain environmental sustainability criteria as a requirement to securing their share of the tourism levy. So it is not too surprising that some years later, the revised marketing plan saw biosphere as an exploitive asset with no obligation for the tourism sector to conserve or sustain what visitors consumed through the various types of visitation experience. That's simply not good enough and I said so publicly.

I formed a friendship with Dr Evelyne Meier, Chair of Great Sandy Biosphere to Noosa's north. Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve is managed by the Burnett Mary Regional Group, a Non-Government Organisation. This biosphere has struggled to get established to the same level as Noosa Biosphere was able to deliver. Noosa has a commitment to share all learning and knowledge with any other biosphere. We did this with Great Sandy.

The Burnett Mary Regional Group board engaged me to work with them on governance within the context of their main body with biosphere as a subsidiary. Evelyne stepped down as their chair in 2013. Their biosphere struggles for recognition. Adoption of the eco-zone concept with Noosa and Fraser Island offered opportunity. The backing of the local government authority was crucial to the early success of the Noosa Biosphere.

Given the complexity of challenges, and the need to be at our best, I instituted annual evaluations of board performance and the leadership at Tourism Noosa, Noosa Biosphere and Eumundi Markets (What's this you may ask?). This included my role as chair. Tourism Noosa, as the first, was in manual form. Both Noosa Biosphere and Eumundi Markets have on-line performance surveys. Each review was a scalable version so as to be appropriate to the size and needs of the organisation. These annual corporate introspective looks at board and CEO performance have helped directors and management focus on outcomes and delivery of strategic initiatives and plans.

Everyone associated with the creation of the Noosa Biosphere can be duly proud. It is important to note the shire of Noosa was by default running under biosphere guidelines well before the UNESCO submission was made. Realising that, recognising what we have and improving on it year on year, is a challenge based around an inherited legacy from predecessors and our own contributions as the current custodians.

After three years of full-on executive chair input I decided not to roll-over again as biosphere chairman and to let the next generation take over and build on our efforts in their own way.

In delivering the first stage of the Noosa Biosphere I need to acknowledge and thank the board and the sector board representatives. Specifically Phil Moran my deputy. Ben and Helen, the best support an executive chair could possibly have. Sincere thanks to you both. We and many more remain good friends after what we worked together to achieve.

At the Noosa Biosphere AGM in November 2011, the organisation unfortunately lost both chair and deputy. Work pressure on my deputy Phil Moran necessitated he reduce his external workload. Absolutely great guy to work with, he says I taught him a few things. He certainly did the same for me.

In September 2011, I had proposed the idea of a sort of Hall of Fame for persons in the community to be rewarded for biosphere contribution each year, not expecting what was to come. Both Phil and I were made Honorary Biosphere Fellows for our contributions on 11 December, 2012.

In both 2011 and 2012, I was also graciously entered by others as a nominee for the Sunshine Coast Australia Day Awards for Community Service. Someone also put me forward for consideration under the Excellence in Past Service to the Local Community Award for Noosa Local Legends on Australia Day 2013. Such listings are generous but unnecessary when all you wish to do is give something back and contribute to making a difference.

Dr Susan Davis was elected chair. Sue worked at Central Queensland University. She had been on the Cultural sector

board for some time. In my opinion, Dr Davis' chairmanship was a period of lost opportunity through a lack of courage to execute key projects resulting in them stalling. While probably worthwhile in themselves small new ideas diluted resources resulting in big ticket items losing focus, not delivering the planned solid gains and so not providing a practical initiatives for the business community and institutions to rally around and build even greater biosphere success.

Don't get me wrong, some consolidation and continuous improvement in grass-roots community engagement happened and the Plan of Management was updated and refreshed. Like my board had been before, her board was challenged to engage with NPA despite several offers and entreaties to find common ground.

Sunshine Coast Council needed to drive a regional return on the communities' investment in biosphere through infrastructure creation and financial outcomes which were meant to augment then reduce the cost of operating the biosphere for everyone across the Sunshine Coast.

I am reliably informed that the regional council didn't see this happening in the way proposed under my chairmanship. They saw politics, inter-institutional rivalry and indecision cloud drive and initiative. If de-amalgamation hadn't happened the funding for Noosa Biosphere Reserve was likely to be cut or significantly reduced.

Building on the first three years of achievement, by year five, Noosa Biosphere Reserve's international profile and status had grown to the point where it was well regarded by UNESCO as an established outstanding global model. Board members were feted by UNESCO as guests and participants at several international biosphere fora expanding the range of 'touch' we already had across the growing biosphere family. Dr Sue Davis, Lindy Atkin and Dr Leah Barclay travelled, spoke and returned to inform on the variety of types of biosphere and where what Noosa had created sat near the top in UNESCO's eyes.

Even so as I have said, big ticket legacy initiatives to add real economic value to the community, earn operating revenue and build new intellectual capacity were left unfulfilled. As examples, I am talking about the benefits from establishing a *Biosphere Institute for Sustainability* and downstream opportunities flowing globally from that initiative, plus taking education tourism to a much bigger level of biosphere based business tourism. Each of these would promote and grow solid economic benefit and direct community job creation.

As a further consequence a clutch of sponsorship proposals were left dormant including one which could have targeted an initiative with Amazon.com and/or Virgin Galactic to benefit many biospheres world-wide. I had prepared drafts for Noosa Biosphere Ltd but the structure of the *Institute* was better suited to facilitate them and gain more from and for the sponsors.

The creation of the *Biosphere Institute for Sustainability: Noosa* aimed to partner with institutions and organisations towards creating a shared repository of leading-edge research and thought-leadership outcomes. This repository and experience was to be accessible by any of the six-hundred plus biospheres and other organisations interested in sustainable practice and application. Importantly, the *Institute* could seek to finance a number of flagship projects by augmenting grants and institutional investment using *crowd-funding*.

Because the state government was restructuring Technical and Further Education (TAFE) our working group proposed that the Institute, once formed, should aim to occupy the excellent, but soon to be vacated, modern TAFE facility at Tewantin. Much groundwork was laid to facilitate this initiative through Greg Livingstone and Ben McMullan.

As a council owned entity, any subsidiary of Noosa Biosphere Ltd requires the complicated and time consuming process of application and approval by State Treasury. As an alternative avenue for start-up, the Institute Working Group recommended the BIS:N legal structure could be expeditiously formed under

the aegis of the Noosa Community Environment Trust (NCET) by early 2014. NCET is formerly affiliated with Noosa Biosphere. NCET holds land and assets in trust for the community as part of acquisitions using funds from the Noosa Environment Levy. NCET is a registered charity for environmental donations.

It was proposed BIS:N's legal structure would also provide a mechanism for philanthropy and bequests. I had connections into a number of private foundations and was of a mind to leverage a number of my mentoring client corporations through my 'C' Suite contacts. I also knew a few local retiree business executives who might be tapped for introductions.

One further initiative I called the Circle of 20. A group of businesspersons to whom the objectives of BIS:N resonated such they would meet twice a year to open doors for project funding sources in partnership with our list of institutions, organisations and specialists. The idea came to me following a conversation with Tasha Lawton about her work with universities in America. Greg Hunt M.P., the then Federal Minister for the Environment, liked the concept and made a number of suggestions as to whom might be approached to join the Circle using his name.

Frustratingly, none of this was to eventuate. Despite the best efforts of the Working Group to get approval by the biosphere governance board, Sue delayed it endlessly. Formation was eventually given consent, but time had stretched too far and despite legals being drafted to implement incorporation at the behest of the governance board the review of the Noosa Biosphere by the new council put it on hold. You can imagine the frustration of the working group to hitting this final brick wall after being ready six months earlier to get going on the *Institute* set-up.

The work to get the best structure and to set-up BIS:N had already taken a couple of years. The advantages of BIS:N for Noosa Biosphere Ltd include: creation of a supportive ancillary revenue stream to replace exclusively council funding; the ability

to take sensible commercial risks (NBL being a community consultative and volunteer action group); access to government grants from which NBL is restricted under the *double-dip* rule; ability to be granted Research Organisation status and gain the benefits of this in partnership with its enterprise network for projects and possibly, just possibly, become the Southern Hemisphere UNESCO Man and Biosphere Office.

Sheraton Noosa Resort and Spa had responded to a business case to sponsor the creation of the original Noosa Biosphere website, establish Noosa Biosphere Day and create podcasts of interviews on our radio program *Voices of the Biosphere*. General Manager, Stephen Ferrigno and his staff also supported the BIS:N concept and generously contributed funds towards the legal costs to set up the Institute. But before the Working Group could finalise this part of the framework, this too had to be put on hold when council's review got underway.

In 2014, Stephen was to brief me regarding his idea for a Noosa Biosphere Reserve Observation Deck on top of the Sheraton Noosa Resort and Spa. He was putting aside funds for the purpose with a target of 2016 for approval and installation. I was asked to work up a briefing paper. I proposed facilities like an interpretive centre, biosphere footprint map, elevated viewing platform plus a visual and audio link between two other high points within the biosphere being Mt Tinbeerwah Lookout and Laguna Lookout. The three locations would afford terrific views of many of the main biosphere areas from hinterland to the sea.

Leading centres of excellence had expressed interest in supporting the *Institute*. One such is the Creative Skills Training Council (CSTC) established by Dr Ralph Kerle, named by IBM as one of the world's *100 Global Creative Leaders*. Ralph and I go back to theatrical days. He with Sydney Theatre Company and me with Nimrod. I am proud to be a Foundation Member of CSTC and to have contributed with Ralph towards its establishment. Affiliating this global think-tank on creativity with BIS:N would be an excellent initiative I had hoped would ultimately

happen. Sadly it may not, nor might connections with other global leadership groups like the Banff Centre for Leadership using Ralph's network.

The first university to make an offer to invest in BIS:N was through Professor George Earl of Bond University on the Queensland Gold Coast. A revenue stream from commercial transactions would flow to underpin the parent organisation Noosa Biosphere Ltd and to fund even more research and application. George put a quarter million dollar letter of in-kind support on the table. The university offered to create a research and learning 'hub'. We had identified the flagship projects and aimed to generate new 21st Century models to resolve or remedy common challenges. The '*create once, share across many*' mantra was to be adopted to realise the *learning laboratory* title conferred on Noosa Biosphere by Dr Ish.

I will now return to local politics and control over the biosphere company.

As it turned out Playford didn't get the four aligned candidates he needed as councillors to push his stated agenda outright. The elected council had good balance and sensible heads, three of whom had served on the former Noosa Council. The former Mayor Bob Abbot became deputy Mayor of the new council. A biosphere working party was formed being Bob Abbot, Noel Playford, Tony Wellington and Frank Pardon. Abbot and Pardon supporting biosphere, Playford and Wellington opposing the current structure.

Much support for the current biosphere structure came from inside council. However, surprisingly the biosphere working group's recommendation was to close the successful current structure down and create a mirror image with some variations. The achievements of six years seemed likely to be trashed including the efforts and reputations of the hundreds of community volunteers who had built the initial success from the ground up. This would be wasteful, costly and with no guarantee of any better result than the model already in place which was repeatedly

heralded by UNESCO as working better than many other biospheres around the globe.

In fact we were visited by many other international biosphere groups wanting to look at the successful 'bottom-up' Noosa model. UNESCO promoted our structure to a great many others as an option for consideration. At UNESCO cost, Dr Davis was invited and attended a number of international biosphere reserve meetings, such was the high regard in which Noosa Biosphere Reserve was held.

Less than a year prior, in October 2013, Noosa Biosphere Ltd released its inaugural *State of the Biosphere Report Card*. The work of Deborah Caruso and her team, who had developed and undertaken the report card, was acknowledged by UNESCO. The report was shared globally to much approbation. But past effort, huge achievement and future opportunity was now seriously at risk.

Not unexpectedly, a tit-for-tat exchange of words erupted in the media, started by those wanting to besmirch the excellent efforts made by so many. Much misinformation, rumour and downright lies were peddled to a willing media. Getting corrections published was a challenge. I joined in trying to keep the exchanges civil, truthful and on-point. A hard task, with one newspaper, the Noosa News, seemingly barracking with bias for the opponent side.

A circuit breaker was needed. In the background I started to suggest the idea of an initiative to change the game. There is a Westminster convention when government or a minister changes, the chairpersons and sometimes boards of agencies or entities reporting to the respective portfolio offer to stand-aside if requested to do so.

I floated the idea firstly with advisers to Dr Davis and then Bob Abbot. Over a week I pushed the idea more widely. Dr Davis called a meeting of some current directors, sectoral interests, past representatives and past directors. I wasn't on the distribution list but was slipped a copy of the email containing the meeting notice. I attended unannounced.

Everyone had their two-bob's worth. Emotions were vented. Finally I spoke to the issues and placed the proposition before them. It was accepted as an option. I stressed legal opinion was wise. Sue Davis asked me to write up a brief and for my recommendation of lawyer and biosphere friend Michael Arnett to be approached for advice.

On the evening of 11 April, Sue, myself, Arnett and Lindy Atkin, deputy biosphere chair plus Eumundi Markets GM and sector board representative Peter Homan all met in the restored and historic Eumundi pub owned by Arnett. Out of this came a brief to Arnett which he accepted *pro bono*, to assist a transition strategy thereby preserving one entity as a foundation for the new. Over two days I undertook shuttle diplomacy between various parties to get the initiative to a point where it could be seriously considered as a workable break-through alternative.

Further deliberations occurred over 15 April and 16 April 2014. Arnett would speak to Abbot as would Davis. As initiator and as a courtesy, I too briefed Bob Abbot. I told Arnett and Davis I had completed the loop of shuttle diplomacy. I offered to support all efforts but handed over to them to deal through Abbot. I was a bit surprised and miffed to then get an email from Sue Davis in effect telling me to butt out. But, on her own admission, she has difficulty in taking advice.

I am unaware of the process that followed but the strategy didn't work because on Friday, 23 May 2014 Council released papers detailing the new biosphere structure the working group was recommending. The former UNESCO heralded and internationally recognised asset was to be replaced after the 2014 Noosa Biosphere Ltd AGM with a three level structure – 1. Strategy, 2. Co-ordination and 3. Doing. Of course Council has a perfect right to do whatever it wants but the plan contained nothing about using the huge experiential and tacit knowledge base created since the biosphere was created, nor acknowledge the achievements, partnerships, sponsors, or people. This may well still occur but are not in the written papers which were approved 29 May.

The Noosa Biosphere Ltd board meeting of Tuesday, 10 June 2014 wasn't adequately briefed by the owner, Council, as to process. For someone with my strong governance background the proceedings were incomplete and messy. Unnecessarily so.

With the release of the papers containing the proposed new structure, Dr Davis had resigned. I can fully understand why and sympathise to some extent. Still, Noosa Biosphere Ltd acted like a victim during the de-amalgamation process and subsequent review. Many sage heads recommended fast tracking the big ticket items like BIS:N and job creation programs to create anchor initiatives with which to defend against the manoeuvrings which could be predicted. This is where courage and initiative was needed but were found lacking.

During my telephone de-brief with Bob Abbot above, he hinted at my perhaps joining the strategy level board to continue contributing to Noosa Biosphere development. I thought not but warmed to the suggestion from the chair of the new biosphere Foundation, Scott Williams, to have a casual advisory role which, not surprisingly, didn't eventuate.

The cumbersome structure, likely political and community players and the way in which the whole transition has been handled didn't enamour me to do so.

At the last NBL board meeting Councillor Frank Pardon also pleaded for those with the legacy, corporate and specialist knowledge not to abandon the biosphere effort.

The very talented and dedicated man who wrote the UNESCO Noosa Biosphere submission, who assisted in the formation and worked next to me along with Helen Gregory for the first successful years of Noosa Biosphere Ltd, Ben McMullen was made redundant on 30 June 2014. So much for a caring supportive social biosphere under the new touchy-feely Council. It seems punitive as Ben is highly regarded for his community liaison work and as an expert science officer.

Curiously, at the same board meeting when Ben spoke to his role obligations and views were expressed he would be missed,

out of the blue, Councillor Tony Wellington suddenly blurted out councillors were prohibited by the Local Government Act from getting involved in staff matters. He then repeated the statement and said he wanted everyone to understand the restriction. Wellington's statement created an immediate suspicion exactly the opposite had indeed occurred because such an interference hadn't been raised. Wellington had created the very suspicion one would wish to avoid if such a thought were present, but it wasn't. The effect hung there like a bad smell.

To exacerbate the issue, Councillor Pardon observed if a majority of councillors so decided to intercede in Ben's redundancy then they had the power to do so. Wellington refused to agree and restated his original comment. The looks around the room at this startling exchange were stunning to observe. The suspicion had been created, well watered and given sunlight. So might it be true undue influence was applied?

Apparently, Ben had already uncovered a review of his department, signed off by him, his boss and others, had been altered twenty-four hours before being tabled. The change created a single excess person where none had existed prior in the original document. Who asked for or instructed the change is only known to Ben but Wellington's extraordinary outburst creates suspicion something was cooked up at the highest levels. Ben no longer wanted to work for Noosa Council after years of dedicated service. He was snapped up by another council.

As several persons were departing the board that night there were some acknowledgements and thanks for effort. Councillor Wellington was conspicuously absent from this part of the meeting.

As I sat in the Tewantin Council Chambers taking in the proceedings I looked at the white board wall in the chamber covered with notations from a planning meeting. One line struck me as just so out of place – *'To be one with our community.'* It sounded like the Borg in Star Trek.

This certainly wasn't coming from Mayor Playford who, according to several old heads still with council, had trouble controlling

his default aggressive style. He even turned on Councillor Tony Wellington twice in Council session much to many people's surprise.

Following his gaining the Mayoral position unopposed, Playford held two meetings. One with *internal* staff and another with *external* staff. A set of new rules was laid down and those present were left in no doubt a return to the old style engaged friendly council, which everyone had warm dreams about, wasn't on this Mayor's agenda.

Playford proudly tells a story of his first teaching job. He had a class of unruly students. His solution to gain their attention was to hurl a hard chalk board eraser at a student. This tale is oft repeated as an example of his expected style. Noel hasn't changed with the times or moderated his behaviour. He is an anachronism.

I believe through the efforts of Dr Davis a meeting of a network of special biosphere reserves was attracted to Noosa in November 2014. By this time Raul Weyhardt had assumed the interim chairmanship to manage the closure of Noosa Biosphere Ltd., making way for the new structure. On 14 November 2014, at a cocktail reception of delegates to the Technical Meeting of Australian Biosphere Reserves and Representatives of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves, Dr Miguel Clusenet-Godt, Divisional Head Ecological and Earth Sciences, World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves, opened his welcome by relating glowing endorsements from both Dr Ish and Madame Bokova to visit Noosa Biosphere Reserve and to experience our success, our structure and our progress.

The next morning, Mayor Playford was to tell what was proposed by the replacement structure in an address titled "New Era for Noosa Biosphere Reserve". His council was closing Noosa Biosphere Ltd on 24 November 2014 some ten days hence.

The audio of the Mayor's briefing is interesting. Given Noel's role in driving the dissolution of the original successful biosphere structure, his explanation of the replacement structure was haltingly delivered. In my opinion, many sideshow trips into minutia,

fumbled explanations and poor delivery, coupled with a lack of detail with which to answer questions adequately, gave an impression of him not being across the subject. He just couldn't answer some questions at all.

On Tuesday, 18 November expressions of interest were called in the local paper for eight founding directors to a Noosa Biosphere Reserve Foundations Ltd. The 'new' biosphere structure comprised a Foundation, a Noosa Biosphere Reserve Trust and a Noosa Biosphere Community Association. Local media, of 26 December 2014, announced the successful appointees. Mayor Playford secured the council nominee slot on the board for himself.

In early January 2015 two articles appeared in the local newspaper. One went into detail about the new biosphere trust not making its deliberations public. The other any protest from the public gallery at meetings would not be countenanced. This extended to the exclusion of recording devices, picture taking or unruly behaviour.

There are instances in which discussion and documentation is best protected. Commercial-in-confidence is one such example. The other seems to be a restriction of free expression over which any good chairman has wide discretion at the time something pops up. Given the entire original biosphere meetings were public and all, other than commercial-in-confidence, items were publically available on its website, making a point of restrictions, just as an organisation sets out on a journey which is supposedly inclusive and community driven, is damn odd.

They say little is ever really new. What was proposed as new thinking by Noosa Shire Council closely mirrored what had already been created; just there would be different drivers behind the steering wheels. I had written a discussion paper on the formation of a foundation, as one of a number of support structures to grow the fledgling Noosa Biosphere Reserve, back in 2009. It turns out the pros and cons detailed in my paper closely resembled the same factors used to justify the new foundation structure.

However, our foundation wasn't stand alone but included within the structure of the proposed institute. Annoyingly, creation

of the *Biosphere Institute for Sustainability: Noosa*, supported by a quarter million dollar start-up fund from Bond University, was repeatedly stymied by Dr Davis. Our Trust entity was the long established and biosphere aligned Noosa Community Environment Trust. I had created a substantial personal bequest towards Noosa Biosphere via the proposed institute but when its start was repeatedly delayed I redirected the funds to other bodies involved in sustaining Noosa's environment.

The proposed community association appears to replace the failed Noosa Parks Association's structure, the Noosa Biosphere Association, which looked to have had mainly NPA members but couldn't seem to get up any initiatives of substance, over some five years, to challenge our successes.

I attended the final AGM on 24 November 2014. I had been there for the creation and was at the finish. A good number of *the dedicated* attended. Some nice words were spoken and all took great pride in the achievements delivered and the effort expended to drive one of the most successful UNESCO biosphere efforts in Australia and possibly globally.

As I drove home, I thought of the words of Roman General and author, Gaius Petronius, who lived during the reign of Nero, and who is alleged to have observed, "*... it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralisation.*"

A topic of hot gossip, during the farewell drinks, was news Noosa Parks Association were about to launch an updated version of their view of Noosa's history. This was incorrect. Noosa and Cooloola is a pictorial record of some fifty years of this place scribed by none other than Cr. Tony Wellington who you will recall was the declared NPA *provocateur* behind the enews-letter diatribe titled *Gum Shoe*.

The NPAs previous 'history' is generally regarded as favouring a particular view of who did what and the outcome, even

claiming some reflected glory for the creation of this place. In any case a number of people present at the function decided to write a 'correct' version of the establishment of Queensland's first biosphere, just in case the true history was lost in other interpretations. Perhaps my notations here can add some weight and credibility to the actual facts.

The original board of the biosphere Foundation seems not to have lasted too long. Williams exited without fanfare along with numerous other talented directors. Replacements were who you would expect Playford, Wellington and Gloster. Similarly, the community association saw change with more talent exiting. Its chair joined the Foundation board eliminating the much vaunted separation of organisational functionality the new structure was meant to have.

Working for and with either organisation appears to have taxed good intentions, eroded trust and hurt individual reputations. Noosa had a demonstrably healthy and successful working biosphere model but politics and power play just had to destroy one to form others which are, so far, sick and mewling. We learn nothing over and over.

And now to the final part of this local trilogy. Careful readers will have read mention of Eumundi markets. What's my association?

The now famous Eumundi markets were established in 1979 by the Eumundi Historical Association (EHA). After nearly 30 years practices, policies and procedures were inadequate to handle what had grown to become a famous tourist attraction, a multi-million dollar enterprise and a mega-retail concern of over three-hundred plus stalls operating mid-week and Saturdays. The relationship with stallholders had become strained. As a cash-cow for the EHA and the principal source of funds for a range of very worthwhile community projects, The Original Eumundi Markets (OEM) as it is known needed change and a face-lift.

Change was needed to refresh, adapt to competition and modernise the operating structure and processes. The General Manager, Peter Homan asked me to consider stepping forward

as a director. The EHA were seeking nominations for a seven person board. I attended the interview and was asked to be one of five inaugural directors for the new trading company. OEM would take over from the EHA in managing leases and property along with the retail stall operation.

Apart from on-site maintenance and repair, which was ridiculously complicated to get approved and complete, we had to look at the experience offered by the markets and refresh, renew and make it different without loss of expectation of visitors or loss of market character.

The Original Eumundi Markets is a major resident and visitor attraction on the northern end of the Sunshine Coast. Each Wednesday and each Saturday the small township bursts with market-goers. Revenue from stallholders funds all costs and contributes a substantial amount of surplus to EHA.

My fellow directors nominated me as Chair. So again I stepped into a challenging and controversial role. This was in September 2010. The Eumundi Historical Society (EHA) still held all site leases and rights but the trading entity The Original Eumundi Markets Limited were site managers under sub-lease obligations. Our role was to expand the operation of the markets without losing the feel, vibrancy or character of the attraction. Our ability to deal commercially with stall holders, providers and suppliers, government and others was a new advantage which had hampered EHA for years.

Our initial board skill-sets covered governance, internal process, events and tourism, finance and logistics, market operations and retail, strategy and application; property management and membership; human resources and management. We elected to run with five directors of a possible seven. After our first year, we asked one director to stand down and moved to fill the full complement. Just as well, as a couple of others would soon also roll over due to personal commitments. The board team were substantially strengthened in the areas of HR and community engagement.

One director Carlo Botto needs recognition for a concept to quality grade stalls, to which we also added complementary clustering of products. This system rewarded long-term stallholders, those with high quality merchandise aligned with market objectives, and offered beneficial priorities to them according to a clear set of new selection and approval criteria. OEM was renowned for originally being artisan markets of high quality and service. This had slipped from focus. Over the next two years the new board and reinvigorated management put in place Carlo's plan. The successful implementation by General Manager, Peter Homan and his management team was supported by good research, consultation and a fast timetable to lessen any frustration and change pain.

Like Tourism Noosa and Noosa Biosphere had needed, the Eumundi board worked with management to overhaul and update internal processes and procedures. The brief dealt with a first-time digital strategy and interlaced revised codes of conduct for board, management and stallholders. Creating a set of workable and practical Key Performance Indicators for a business like this was a challenge but we got there.

As the markets are a closed physical environment with a great reputation, loyal customers and a new stallholder footprint, I foresaw an opportunity to create apps and permission based, push marketing campaigns using smart phones. Our administration between OEM and stallholders could be managed in the same way. Migrating our systems to mobile transaction platforms was a no-brainer.

After nearly two years I decided more private travel would conflict with chairman duties and responsibilities and I was not well. I gave notice I would not re-stand at the next AGM. Carlo and I prepared a succession plan and worked with the then Eumundi and District Historical Association chairperson Joyce Turnbull to find one replacement director and a new chair. Carlo went for the chairmanship but didn't get the support needed. So Carlo too moved along as did Tom Casileris.

The chair at time of writing is Christine Sutton, joined by Justine Eden and John Murlewski. The new Eumundi and District Historical Association chairwoman is Donata Page. I occasionally met with Chris and Justine for a chat and update. It is nice to be included as a mentor. I introduced Kym Cheatham as a potential new director with her excellent tourism, environmental and organisational capabilities. Kym joined the board for a time and is well regarded by her peers.

As I stood down, I had forecast the GM role needed to change through a split in the role and discussed with Chris how and when a transition might be undertaken. Our conversation was broad and high level with some tactical considerations. In 2014, Peter Homan declined to reapply for the GM role. He left the markets to take up the position of General Manager, Outback Queensland based in Longreach.

Increasingly, my previously robust energy levels were declining. Also, Carol wanted to travel more and I was not going to miss out either.

I had sold *iMentor-pro* to Kylie Hammond but maintained a clutch of Brisbane based corporate clients through Whyte & Co and Blackswan. These would be managed around our travel plans with any luck. This worked well.