

# **A “COMMON CAUSE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT GROUP COALITION” (ESG) FOR OUR REGION**

**AN ESSAY ON SYSTEM LEVEL IDEAS TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY  
FOR NATURE LOSS AND CLIMATE DISRUPTION**

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### *Quotes*

*Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings within the ecological limits of a finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. It is the most urgent task of our times.*

*(Tim Jackson, Economist).*

*Remember that the future is not somewhere where we are going, it is something we are creating. Every day we do things that make some futures more probable and others less likely.*

*(Professor Ian Lowe, Environmental Scientist)*

*Must we change? Can we change? Will we change?*

*(Al Gore, politician and environmentalist)*

## 1.0 Purpose of this document

The Toowoomba and Darling Downs region along with other national and global areas is experiencing continued environmental damage and intensifying climate disruption. The closely linked health and wellbeing of our regional human and other species communities is already suffering as a result of these impacts and, on current trends, is set to get worse. Against that background, this essay was written for the Householders' Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) organisation by member Andrew Nicholson. Given the dire circumstances, it was written, unapologetically, in a spirit of idealism and high ambition. It is intended as a facilitative provocation and conversation starter, structured around some key questions and associated assumptions. The questions include:

- In the light of escalating regional environmental problems, could or should a long-term, common cause coalition of our independent environment support groups (ESGs) be formed to achieve better protection of our deteriorating environment?
- How might such a coalition be able to extend the existing, valuable, largely reactive environment support work, advocacy and community engagement efforts already conducted by ESGs and concerned citizens. How to develop a more proactive advocacy model aimed primarily at achieving institutional, system level environmental reforms?
- If formed, how might a common cause ESG coalition adopt new advocacy approaches to increase calls and pressure for reform of our failing institutions and system-level processes which currently help impede, not progress, the ability to create a more ecologically healthy, socially fairer and climate stable future. These failings include our increasingly unequal and nature destroying neoliberal economy, our unrepresentative politics, our inadequate environmental laws, and our undemocratic, non-citizen inclusive governance institutions.
- Such institutional failures, coupled with our market driven overconsumption and psychological determinants of a widespread 'culture of uncare' are the ultimate, long-term drivers of continued environmental damage and decline. These failings must be halted and completely reformed if our natural world, environment and planetary systems are not to experience a continued 'death by a thousand cuts.' A continued threat to planetary environmental health equates to a continued threat to human and other species health and wellbeing.
- At present, the bigger picture failings and impediments to achieving enhanced long term environmental protection, and new, system-level advocacy and community engagement approaches to help counter them, are not being considered enough by environmental support groups across our region.
- Are there alternative solutions to forming an ESG coalition and using new system level advocacy methods to help mobilise the wider community around escalating, long term, system-level generated environmental problems and drivers? If so, what are they?

It is hoped that responses to these questions will act as a conversation starter amongst our independent, citizen-lead, environment support groups (ESGs), as well as amongst any non-group aligned, environmentally concerned citizens. Our regional ESGs would be expected to include certain First Nations groups, Darling Downs Environment Council, Householders' Options to Protect the Environment, Toowoomba for Climate Action, Friends of Escarpment Parks, Toowoomba Field Naturalists Club and Toowoomba Bird Observers, to name but a partial selection.

Although diverse in their objectives and actions, all of these groups could be said to share a common cause. That is, an interest in helping to achieve a preferred, sustainable future for our regional communities. A

future which is more ecologically healthy and climate stable, more socially fair, just and inclusive, and which is economically prosperous.

In writing this essay, Andrew drew upon his long experience as an environmental educator, resident and member of several ESG's of the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region. The essay is written in the spirit of stimulating an open, constructive debate around the possibilities canvassed. It will be clear by the end of the essay, however, that Andrew's personal preference is to see a common cause ESG coalition convened.

The remainder of the essay is organised as follows.

- Section 2.0 gives a short read, dot point summary of the main ideas and assumptions made.
- Section 3.0 builds a more detailed exploration of the same issues, with URL links for online reference follow up.
- Section 4.0 offers some tentative suggestions for the formation and early operation of a common cause collation of ESGs in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region.
- Section 5.0 is the concluding section of the document and summarises the main ideas covered. It repeats essay focus questions and the call for feedback from the various ESGs on the ideas canvassed.

## 2.0 Shorter read - summary of ideas used, and assumptions made (720 words)

### The new problems and some new approaches to tackle them.

1. Escalation of environmental damage (to nature, wildlife and climate stability) with consequent impacts on human and other species health and wellbeing is driven, ultimately, by powerful and hitherto largely unaddressed institutional, system level, economic, political and cultural forces. These increasingly clear destructive forces require a possible rethink of how to approach community led environmental support and advocacy processes in this region and elsewhere.
2. In this region valuable environment support work has been conducted over many years by various citizen-led, local and regional environment support groups (ESGs). These groups include HOPE, Darling Downs Environment Council (DDEC), Toowoomba for Climate Action (T4CA), First Nations groups and Friends of the Escarpment Parks (FEP) Toowoomba, to name a few.
3. The current form of ESG community environmental restoration, education, campaigning and public mobilisation efforts, aimed at countering continued environmental threats, will remain absolutely **necessary**, but may no longer be **sufficient** to deal with ongoing, system level institutional drivers responsible for long-term environmental decline.
4. One key suggestion in this essay is that ESGs in our region might achieve both a necessary **and** sufficient future community-led environmental support role by extending their work. This extension could incorporate new, environment support approaches aimed at reforming failed elements of our current economic, political, legal, governance and consumer culture responses to dealing with ecological decline and climate disruption. These new approaches include:
  - Participatory democracy action in the form of citizen juries and assemblies convened to make recommendations on environmental matters. Such initiatives could also combine with the genuine inclusion of citizens and their contributions into environmental planning and decision making by regulatory authorities.
  - Wellbeing economy framed community capacity building. These processes involve citizens directly in consideration of how future economic development can co-exist, authentically, with more ecologically healthy and socially fair community need. This wellbeing economic worldview sees the economy as existing primarily to progress the health and wellbeing of communities, both human and other species, not the other way around.
  - Cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaborations which recognise that the often complex, and multilayered environmental problems we now face will not be solved with simple and

out of date solutions. This approach recognises that we need the variety and combined wisdom of many different perspectives coming together in common cause to achieve a preferred, truly sustainable future which balances properly the needs of people, planet and prosperity. This will be a future which is more ecologically healthy, more socially just and is economically sufficient.

- The exposure and rejection of new, increasingly manipulative and cynical forms of greenwashing. And equal rejection of wholly contradictory approaches to environmental problems by powerful vested interests. Sadly, such vested interests often include the very governmental and regulatory authorities charged with the responsibility to protect the ecological, environmental and therefore human health of their communities.

### **Some possible implications for regional environment support groups**

One way that regional ESGs could incorporate some of the newer, system level reform approaches mentioned here would be to convene a long-term, environmental common cause coalition. Such a collaborative group could benefit in a number of ways from pooling its individual member group environmental support knowledge, advocacy skills and values base. The early work of such a coalition could involve:

- A coalition group could develop a collaborative vision, strategy and plan of action to achieve a preferred, more ecological healthy and climate stable future for our region.
- A coalition group could present such a draft environmental plan of action to the wider regional community for feedback, perhaps as part of a capacity building, wellbeing economics community engagement exercise.
- A coalition group could incorporate any public feedback received. It could then use such a community mandated plan of action as the basis for further, informed advocacy by the coalition group to all levels of government and regulatory authorities.
- A coalition group could use elements of a publicly endorsed, preferred future environmental plan of action to critique and assess whether government and regulatory environmental decision-making was fit for purpose in relation to the community's own plan objectives.
- A coalition group could advocate for a permanent place for members and other citizens at the government and regulatory environmental decision-making table. This would represent advocacy for a genuine community inclusion process which truly values and actually incorporates informed citizen contributions into decision-making.

The remainder of the essay explores these ideas in more detail. It poses a number of stimulus questions to assist readers to think about their own approach to the issues raised, and to supply feedback to the HOPE organisation acting as a central collation point.

Section 3.0 of the essay which now follows gives a more detailed consideration to some of these points. The URL links to online resources are provided for those readers who may wish more background detail.

## **3.0 Longer more detailed read with URL links (2000 words)**

### **3.1 The Problems**

We live in paradoxical times. On the one hand, the collective intelligence of [Homo sapiens](#) has brought us amazing scientific breakthroughs and almost miraculous technological achievements. The advent of gene editing and artificial intelligence to name but two at random. On the other hand, a combination of our great talents for [individual and collective](#) delusion about the state of the environment, our clinging to [outdated narratives of progress](#), and the exercise of wilful ignorance in the face of growing scientific understanding,

has helped produce [unprecedented natural systems damage](#), and an [existential threat](#) to the continued stable functioning of our closely interconnected global society.

Many of us now understand and have witnessed that the richness of our nature and wildlife, and the stability of our climate is [continuing to deteriorate](#), with increasingly dire consequences for our [health, wellbeing](#) and general quality of life. Scientific evidence strengthens the conclusions that we are near to irreversible [tipping points](#) produced by climate disruption, and are witnessing a global [sixth mass species extinction event](#) within the natural world.

Environmental destruction is driven, ultimately, by our failed institutions and development systems. A prime example is the crass, free market, [neoliberal economic system](#) which has dominated global society for the last forty-five years or so. This form of [failed capitalism](#) equates progress with infinite growth on a finite planet, and requires the exploitation of nature, wildlife, and marginalised human communities to maintain it. The nature destroying and [socially unjust consequences](#) of our current, reckless, economic development models are closely interlinked, and have now reached crisis point. Such challenges will require pro-active, visionary, [institutional level reform](#) of our economic, political, legal and governance structures, and widespread, selfish and uncaring [cultural worldviews](#).

These are some of the constellation of multilayered and interconnected ‘wicked’ problems we need to solve if we are ever going to repair the increasingly fractured relationship between humans, nature and the planetary systems which underpin the continued wellbeing of all species, including ourselves.

And shockingly, it does not appear, at least in the short term, as if we can look to the majority of our [governments and alleged regulatory authorities](#) to step up to the growing crises we face, and to better fulfill a crucial duty within their democratic responsibilities. That is the responsibility to protect public safety, health and wellbeing. Discharging that responsibility requires the competence to understand that continued human and other species wellbeing is now strongly linked to the [effective management of climate disruption and its growing impacts](#). It is also linked to implementing effective solutions to counter the appalling loss of nature and wildlife. This loss must be halted, and biodiversity restoration efforts greatly increased. These required actions are part of the call to develop new [nature positive](#) strategies and approaches.

On the plus side, evidence-based research has led us to well understand what government and regulatory authorities **should** be doing to fulfill their protective citizen health and wellbeing responsibilities. The crucial question is, are they doing the work? Are they, for example, acting to:

- Set, monitor and report regularly and publicly on progress toward achieving ambitious, science-based [greenhouse gas reduction](#) targets?
- Educate their communities on the seriousness of the [climate disruption adaptation challenges](#) we will continue to face across coming decades?
- Invite genuine participation and [implement citizen and community contributions](#) to future decision making on climate disruption, nature loss and other environmental challenges?
- Move quickly to better [manage, protect and wherever possible enhance](#) the quantity and quality of green space, nature and wildlife within their jurisdictions. And including substantive community input in all decision making on such nature-positive matters?

A large number of responsible authorities around the world, in Australia and in our own region, are clearly [not fulfilling, adequately or at all](#), even this small sample of environmentally supportive actions. Certainly not if we look beyond rhetoric and PR spin for [real, measurable, on the ground outcomes](#). Too often our regulatory authorities either lack sufficient legislative and control powers; are too slow to act, or too weak and ineffective in implementing control measures, even when they do possess nominal powers.

At other times, the actions of regulatory authorities appear either naïve, [misguided or frankly contradictory](#) in relation to serious environmental threats such as [climate disruption](#). In metaphorical terms, it is as if governments and relevant agencies are asleep in the passenger front seat of a destructive neoliberal juggernaut. The vehicle is being driven over the edge of an environmental cliff by greedy and deluded vested interests.

In summary, there is a lack of responsible government, regulatory leadership and effective action in relation to our growing environmental challenges. This background generates some further questions.

- Given the new found urgency of our environmental damage predicament, what should be the response of the community environment support sector now, and looking ahead into the short to mid-term future, say, the next 2- 10 years?
- What might be the implications for such predictions for the future work of the environment support groups (ESGs) active within the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region?

Before thinking forward toward possible future behaviours, it can be instructive to look back through the rear-view mirror of the history of ideas and past behaviour. Perhaps by doing so we can gain further insight into the mix of old and new tactics which will be most effective for continued, community-led support and protection of the environment.

### **3.2 A brief history of reactive ESG responses – political protest and advocacy to defend specific valued places.**

Dissatisfaction with the level of protection afforded the environment and natural world is of course not new. From the [early 1960's onward](#) there was a growing realisation that negative human impacts on the planet and its atmosphere were growing. By the early 1970's, such concerns had crystallised into an ever-widening circle of public protest. That protest manifested, largely, to the form of public mobilisation and political rallying against the destructive development threats posed to specific natural areas or individual species. In Australia, one thinks of the iconic mass protests to [save Lake Pedder](#) in Tasmania in the early 1970s or [later in that decade](#), the northern New South Wales, anti-logging protests in the Terania Creek rainforest.

Such valuable public campaigning in support of protection of the natural world, often in the face of powerful and collusive government and private sector vested interests, helped write a well-used playbook of advocacy and protest techniques which have come up through the decades to us today. Nationally, one thinks of the [Franklin River Campaign](#) of the early 1980's, the [Jabiluka anti-Uranium protests](#) of the late 1990s, near Kakadu National Park, and all the way through to the [Carmichael Adani coal mine](#) protests in central Queensland occurring within the last decade.

### **3.3 System level drivers of environmental destruction – new community advocacy approaches.**

The Carmichael/Adani mine protests in Australia mirrored the growing concern internationally over the [climate disruptive impacts of coal, gas and oil](#). There has been an [increasingly sophisticated](#) global environmental advocacy understanding of the motives of [vested financial interests](#) in driving the call for continued development of fossil fuel reserves. And this call is continuing, even as the planet's oceans and atmosphere continue to heat, thanks to human produced atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases not seen in the [planetary record](#) for millions of years. In that distant past time average atmospheric temperatures and ocean levels were significantly higher than today. There are clear, prehistoric, climate system trends here pointing to serious implications for our modern world. Even more far-sighted supporters of neoliberal economic development models recognise the [huge risks posed](#) to future human health, wellbeing and even survival by irresponsible fossil fuel development interests. Many of these interests profess to have strong environmental support credentials, [whilst lobbying against, stalling or ditching effective action](#) to counter climate disruption and biodiversity loss.

Some new community level responses have been generated by this recognition of the now planetary scale environmental impacts being produced by destructive, **business as usual**, neoliberal economic processes (BAU). Some of these new approaches are complementary to the suite of existing environment support group methods of the early pioneers, some less so. Thus, some ESGs have shifted their focus, toward critiquing and [protesting](#) the structural inadequacy of continued fossil fuel powered development, and government collusion with it. Others are offering well informed [alternative environment policy proposals](#) to those generated through [business as usual](#) practices. Yet another response is coming from the movement to achieve 'Deep Adaptation'. Supporters of that movement conclude we have already passed the point of environmental no return and are headed for a likely collapse of our current global development systems

within the next decade or so. As a result, the movement believes we need to implement a set of [deep adaption responses](#) if we are to survive as a functioning civilisation.

### 3.4 Common cause understandings across diverse system level approaches

Although diverse in their origins, in the scope of their response to BAU, and in the ways in which they set about catalysing change, it can be argued that all of these approaches share a common cause perspective. This is inherent in the critique they bring to outdated, no longer fit for purpose ways of organising human society and the problems this has caused. Equally, all of these groups or initiatives are predicated on a commonly held idea of achieving a preferred future, one in which human society comes into better long-term balance with the planetary systems which are now barely struggling to cope with our demands and impacts.

Some groups described in the list to follow have evolved a bigger picture approach to reacting against destructive and unhealthy fossil fuel powered economic development, whilst retaining some of the community environment support advocacy methods of old. Others are focussed more exclusively on achieving system level change, though not necessarily using direct political protest to achieve that outcome.

- **School Strike for Action, Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion (XR)** are [examples](#) of public protest movements, both [youth](#) and adult facilitated. They use old style [street protests](#) and associated techniques. They differ from some older protest approaches in the way they frame public attention onto the problems of climate disruption and environmental decline. They have more of a global scale focus and a clear understanding of the system level responsibility for continued climate disruption problems. They see that responsibility as laying squarely with fossil fuel industries and collusive governments.
- **Deliberative democracy initiatives** - As the climate and biodiversity crises have intensified still other activists and groups have called for better forms of representative democracy and citizen inclusive decision making for the environment. In the UK, this call has seeded new ways to [incorporate citizen ideas](#) for environmental solutions into citizen-government engagement. For instance, within the last 10 years, deliberative democracy methods have been implemented in the form of representative citizen groups termed [citizen juries](#) and citizen assemblies. These bodies have explored issues such as climate disruption impacts, and offered government their citizen generated recommendations for solutions.

In Australia, there has been a recent call by the [Wilderness Society](#) to achieve greater citizen input to environmental decision-making here, and for a national approach to be taken to such community rights. This is an example of a growing interest in using participatory and deliberative democracy methods here. It is increasingly understood that achieving more citizen inclusive environmental decision making could make an important contribution to community-led environmental support advocacy.

- **Wellbeing economic frameworks**  
Given that the current neoliberal economic model is [ultimately at the heart](#) of many of our environmental woes, it is hardly surprising that numerous attempts have been made [over the years](#) to suggest viable alternative forms of capitalist economy; forms that would avoid business as usual failings and ensure proper environment protection and social fairness.

Since the early 1960's there have been various iterations of environmental and ecological economic frameworks that proposed that the economy should, first and foremost, be in service to society and the environment and [not the other way around](#). Such frameworks have put greater emphasis on fair distribution of economic output and promoting the environmental and social good using non-



monetary measures of economic achievement. For instance, the [extent of happiness and equality](#) in a society. This approach has stood in stark contrast to neoliberal obsession with simply growing the economy at any cost; and using crude aggregate measures [such as GDP](#) to convince us all that this is a favourable outcome.

One of the most recent and promising approaches to alternative economic development thought has come from the emerging field of [wellbeing economics](#). The so-called doughnut economics (DE) model is one of the best-known frameworks from that field and has gained considerable international attention in recent years. In simple terms, [doughnut economics](#) proposes that the core purpose of any economy is to provide a safe, ecologically healthy and socially fair living space for human and other species communities. Those communities can achieve good levels of wellbeing, in that space but only within and not exceeding the boundaries of the ecological systems which support those communities.

In Australia, the [Regen Melbourne](#) and [Regen Brisbane](#) projects are examples of the use of the DE model. It is helping the citizens and communities of those cities to develop a community led strategic vision of a preferred future, one in which a more socially fair, ecologically healthy and prosperous city economy can be developed.

- **Cross-sectoral approaches to environmental problem solving**

The concept that the solution to a difficult problem might benefit from the sharing of knowledge and ideas across multiple perspectives is hardly a new one. In the context of the now often complex, [multilayered 'wicked' environmental problems](#) facing us, this concept has gained further traction. One way to improve the chance of obtaining and sharing multiple perspectives on possible solutions to a core identified problem, such as climate disruption or biodiversity loss, is to form an alliance or coalition of parties based upon a recognised, common cause interest shared amongst them.

A good example of such a coalition in the Australian environment support space is provided by the [Climate and Health Alliance](#) (CAHA). This body was formed from scratch in 2010 to address a perceived lack of effective policy and action regarding the impacts of climate disruption onto human health in this country. It is now considered to be Australia's peak climate and health organisation and is a valued advisory body to the Albanese Federal Government in 2023. Significantly, CAHA has grown into a coalition of over one hundred health sector organisations including medical groups, academic and research institutions, health care service providers and unions. It also has over two hundred individual supporters.

In the State of Queensland, we have a further example of a coalition organisation that advocates for reform across the boundary of environmental and social wellbeing. Formed in only 2013, the [Queensland Community Alliance](#) (QCA) now lists 35 member organisations representing 1.7 million Queenslanders as part of its overall coalition structure. The Alliance is primarily an advocacy organisation, seeking better levels of social care provision for the benefit of human health and wellbeing across the state. The Alliance has also used its strength of numbers to call on the state government to boost the creation of environment related jobs and industries, and to adopt effective climate change solutions which ensure Queensland 'does its fair share to keep global warming under 2°C and as close to 1.5°C as possible.'

The stories of the evolution of CAHA and QCA provide object lessons in the growing power of long term, common cause, coalitions which advocate for environment support and protection linked to human health and wellbeing needs. Their push for system level change and better government response to climate disruption and nature loss impacts is now bearing fruit.

- **Support for environmental law reform**

Our current economic development and political regulatory systems at global level are failing to offer adequate protection to the natural world, planetary environment systems, and climate stability. To this abject list must be added the Australian national and regional failure of our alleged environmental protection laws and regulations. Whether it be the federal level Environment

Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, albeit currently under review, or the myriad of state and local government regulatory protections, supposedly in place to regulate inappropriate and destructive development; the outcomes have been the same. A manifest failure to halt nature loss, for instance, in the form of continuing, huge [tree clearance rates](#) in Queensland, or to achieve significant reductions in [properly accounted](#) greenhouse gas emissions, both nationally and including those embodied in fossil fuel exports.

There has been growing recognition that our laws and regulatory safeguards for environmental protection are wholly unfit for purpose and must be reformed fundamentally. In Queensland and other states, such recognition is reflected in calls to institute [environmental protection agencies](#) with real independent and effective powers to scrutinise and curb destructive development. At federal level, some individuals and groups have taken recent [direct legal action](#) against the government, in part as a way of bringing public attention to its perceived failure of [duty of care to protect](#) Australian communities from the environmental harm of climate disruption related health and wellbeing impacts, including rising sea levels.

In summary, I suggest that some of these more recent, common cause, environmental support advocacy approaches may be worth exploring in greater depth by regional environment support groups. A unifying theme across all of the approaches is that they seek change to existing, environmentally destructive [business as usual](#) practices at an institutional and system level. These approaches could fit well with and complement existing, more issue-specific environment support group advocacy work in the region. They could, perhaps, help create both a necessary **and** sufficient level of common cause advocacy to pit against the continuing wave of environmentally destructive development taking place here.

In the final section of this essay, I consider the possible implications of this background analysis for the future work of the various environment support groups operating in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region. Some focus questions here are:

- Could the current valuable work of environmental protection, restoration, advocacy and campaigning provided by the various independent environment support groups be enhanced and extended?
- Could we incorporate some of the system level reform approaches suggested in the preceding section to achieve that objective?

#### **4.0 A common cause coalition of ESGs for the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region?**

In our own region the previously described, interconnected drivers of environmental destruction and decline have been all too evident in recent years. So too have been the sturdy and largely traditional methods of community protest and citizen led political campaigning to reject such damage. It is to be celebrated that we have such strong, ongoing, community vigilance and protest to challenge inappropriate development in our region. It is very likely, however, that without sustained, institutional and system level, economic, legal and political reform, crass, solely monetary valuation of the natural world, and continued, contradictory development of fossil fuel reserves, will be abetted by our wholly inadequate regulatory controls to help further destabilise our climate and threaten what is left of our local natural places and wildlife.

So, whilst more traditional and reactive community led advocacy and protest will clearly continue to be needed, what about that longer term, system level reform advocacy required to challenge the ultimate institutional drivers of continued destruction of our natural world and climate stability? How many regional organisations are championing this vital cause? The continuing tragedy of ‘nature’s death by a thousand cuts’ surely has to be challenged more effectively if we are ever to move to a truly sustainable regional community here. As already implied in this essay, one way to do that might be to form a common cause coalition of environment support groups in this region.

Rather than remaining vigilant and largely reactive to the latest environmental threat, such a coalition group might extend its reach to become more proactive. For instance, it could develop its own regional environment support vision and strategy, incorporating community level input, and develop its own plan

for a preferred, more ecologically healthy, socially fair and economically prosperous future for our region. It could then use that coalition group generated and community supported plan to advocate, to all relevant levels of government and regulatory authority, for reform of their processes and hitherto failed attempts to safeguard our health and wellbeing from the continued destruction of our natural places and climate stability.

And the good news here is that a template for such a coalition already exists. We may draw relevant lessons from two, recent, successful environmental protest campaigns in this region. These were both aimed at preventing destruction of ecologically valuable remnant bushland in the Toowoomba city area, at Mount Lofty in 2020, and Redwood Park in 2022.

#### **4.1 A recent history of successful group collaborative advocacy in the region**

Both the ‘Save Mount Lofty’ and ‘Save Redwood Park’ campaigns were based upon a reactive coalition of concerned local citizens and environment support groups. They convened to reject proposed destructive commercial development of specific, ecologically valuable green spaces. These coalitions assembled for a one-off, relatively short-term purpose. They pooled their environmental knowledge and skills in community mobilisation and political lobbying and won the contest to save those areas. In the process, valuable spaces and places for nature and wildlife, and public recreation, were protected; and the interlinked benefit of maintaining green space mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions was also secured.

A strong community vigilance and public protest coalition and mobilisation against inappropriate development helped save Mount Lofty and Redwood Park bushland. Sadly, the current, crass economic valuation of the natural world will almost certainly continue to threaten what is left of our local natural places and wildlife. Such development proposals will need to be resisted at every turn, in part by employing the traditional public protest toolbox of methods. Our more traditional community environment support methods will remain an important resource if those natural assets are not to decline further.

On the other hand, some more questions suggest themselves here:

- Could we change tactics relating to site specific, reactive, public environment protection and support mobilisation and campaigning?
- Could we extend the community vigilance and advocacy role so well demonstrated in the shorter-term coalitions formed for the Save Mount Lofty and Redwood Park campaigns?
- Could we form a longer term or permanent, common cause coalition of regional environment support groups?
- Could such a coalition group then combine an environmental protective and one-off campaigning capability with a longer term, system level reform, advocacy role?
- Could such a coalition become stronger and more capable of fulfilling such an enhanced, reactive **and** proactive role, by pooling its financial and human resources?

Such a regional ESG coalition (CCESG) if formed, could also help strengthen future citizen led responses to climate disruption here. In this region we need ongoing, strong and determined community advocacy pressure on government, at all levels, to insist on a full, proper and speedy transition away from fossil fuels. This objective must be achieved in the recognition that the growing climate disruption problem is tied to the growing nature loss problem, and that both of those problems, in turn, increasingly impact the health and wellbeing of our human and other species communities.

And our environment support groups must surely find a way to call out, systematically, and at every opportunity, contradictory greenwash masquerading as effective policy on climate disruption mitigation and adaptation. We must find ways to support our citizens and communities here to have a direct and effective say in developing more realistic climate disruption mitigation and adaptation strategies. And we must find ways to get multiple citizen voices heard and included in decisions on how to shield our communities from the worsening impacts of climate change intensified weather systems, which we know will intensify in the years ahead.

## 5. Outline suggestions for the structure and operation of a common cause collation of ESGs

The main idea suggested here is to draw upon the best of the existing work of regional environment support groups, and then extend it by convening a common cause environment support coalition. This coalition group would not, however, be limited to rallying support for one-off nature protection or climate disruption mitigation campaigns, important though such work is and will continue to be.

So, what might the early formation and initial actions of such an ESG coalition group look like? Here are some purely personal and tentative suggestions for its first 12 – 24 months of operation.

1. One of the existing ESGs would take the lead in seeking an expression of interest to form a long-term coalition of independent regional ESG groups or individuals including, in the first instance, DDEC, HOPE, T4CA, interested First Nations representatives, Toowoomba Field Naturalists Club, Toowoomba Bird Observers and possible others. Casting the net more widely, the lead group could also reach out to independent advocacy organisations with a system level environment protection reform focus, such as the EDO Queensland branch, and the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA). Beyond that would be the opportunity to seek consultancy advice from regional universities and certain other, professional, expert bodies. This envisaged collaboration between independent ESG groups as well as a variety of professional bodies would ‘tick the box’ of interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration benefits.
2. Following initial formation of a coalition group a suitable name would be chosen, perhaps reflective of its extended, system level reform advocacy objectives. Member groups would then collaborate on a regular basis, sharing their unique individual knowledge and skills related to nature protection and enhancement, and closely linked concerns for control of climate disruption. The coalition member ESG groups would work co-operatively in common cause, to develop a founding vision, mission and values statement, framed in terms of their collaborative work to achieve a range of environmentally supportive outcomes as outlined below.
3. The coalition of ESGs could then draw upon its collective and external stakeholder expertise to develop a joint strategy and plan of action to achieve a preferred, more nature positive and less climate disrupted future for this region. It could then put that strategy out for wider public and community response via a range of physical workshops, webinars, online surveys and text documents. The option of using a wellbeing economics framework for such initial community capacity building engagement could also be considered at this point. This option is covered in more detail shortly. The consultancy expertise of a regional group such as AELA could be of value here.
4. Any subsequent public feedback could be incorporated into the design of a final coalition group vision, strategy and plan of required actions. Backed by coalition group member strength of numbers, and a community supported mandate, the coalition could then go on to use these documents to advocate, proactively, for system level economic, governance and legal protection reforms.
5. One early action of the coalition in using its community environment support strategy and plan might be a call to incorporate its principles for achieving a more nature positive and less climate disrupted preferred future for our region into planning and regulatory authority decision making. As part of this same process, the coalition group could critique poorly framed, weak or underutilised policy and regulatory frameworks, where relevant, at Federal, State and local government level.
6. Additionally, and where relevant to its primarily system level, advocacy focus, the ESG coalition group could also call for a genuine, consultative place at the environmental decision-making table within various levels of government and with other regulatory authorities. Such attempts to gain greater involvement in citizen led environmental decision making would help tick the box on achieving greater levels of genuine, citizen inclusive participatory democracy.

7. An ambitious project for the ESG coalition group would be the organisation of a wellbeing or doughnut economics community visioning process. Such an initiative would require much preparatory work and cross-sectoral co-operation from stakeholders, gradually recruited into the coalition group's growing network. One exciting aspect of such a project is that it could bring together many of the elements of the new approaches to system level reform discussed throughout this essay. And the regional community would get a better chance to talk about, envision and be mobilised to push for a truly sustainable, preferred regional future which properly balances the environmental, social, and economic needs of our citizens for the first time.
8. In order to help anchor these various, admittedly ambitious community engagement goals, a common cause coalition group could negotiate access to and develop the resources for a public education centre building in Toowoomba. This building could house the public engagement materials used by individual member groups of the coalition but, importantly, also those produced jointly, by the ESG coalition itself. Such coalition produced materials could include the previously described joint vision and strategy for a nature positive and climate stable regional future. As the coalition's work grew, a wider range of educational and media promotional materials would be displayed at the 'HQ' as noted below.
9. A coalition group facilitation of such an education centre could involve:

Public education and engagement around the 'story' of creating the coalition vision for an enhanced, regional, nature positive place and space for nature, a serious commitment to achieving measurable, evidence-based greenhouse gas reduction targets; and proper plans for realistic community adaptation to the inevitability of future climate disruption impacts. The evolving story line would also include an ongoing account of the responses of government and regulatory authorities to the coalition's advocacy on its vision, strategy and action plan.

A story thread which would provide strong messaging to visitors on the urgent need for holistic, collaborative, citizen-inclusive approaches to future environmental decision making and management in our region. That thread could report on how the coalition group was helping to progress its reforming environment support agenda, and how citizens and community members could participate actively in that work.

Frequent regular opening to encourage maximum public visitation achieved through efficient organisation of ESG member volunteers.

Now to a recap of what has been covered in this essay.

## **5.0 Conclusions**

The natural world along with its wildlife and climate stability is in major decline everywhere, including in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region. This decline has serious implications for the continued human health and wellbeing of all of our regional communities, both human and other species. The ultimate long-term drivers of environmental damage rest within the institutional, system-level failings of our increasingly unequal, crassly monetised and extractivist neoliberal economy, in our unrepresentative and collusive politics, in our inadequate environmental laws, and in our undemocratic non-citizen inclusive governance processes.

In our region we have our own particular mix of these system-level failings. They include wholly inadequate approaches to managing climate disruption, either in terms of science-based greenhouse gas emission mitigation, or community adaptation planning. Our remnant bushland and ecologically valuable green spaces are also at continued threat of encroachment by poorly regulated urban development and agricultural expansion.

This essay has advanced one key idea to help counter the existing, bleak ‘environmental death by a thousand cuts’ regional scenario. That idea is to form a common cause ESG coalition of existing environment support groups. Some recent examples of successful environment support achievements made through a coalition process have been previously described at national and Queensland state level.

And here in our own region, the recent ‘Save Mount Lofty’ and ‘Save Redwood Park’ campaigns demonstrate the success of environmentally supportive, common cause coalitions. In both cases, a coalition of interested groups and individuals pooled their environmental knowledge, skills in community mobilisation and in political lobbying. Both of these common cause coalition groups won the contest to save the ecological and public enjoyment value of their respective places for nature.

Those latter coalitions, formed as part of local bushland protections campaigns, were assembled for a one-off, relatively short-term purpose. What is proposed in this essay is that their example of reactive response could and should be extended. It has been suggested that one way to do that would be to convene a long term, common cause coalition, to tackle the long-term institutional and system level drivers which, otherwise, will **continue** to pose serious environmental health and wellbeing threats, both to human and other species, in our region.

It has also been suggested that a new, long term, common cause ESG coalition for this region could adopt new methods and approaches to aid community led system-level, environment support efforts here. For instance, such a coalition could develop its own vision, strategy and plan of action to achieve a preferred, more nature positive and less climate disrupted future. Through effective networking it could gradually grow its system-level advocacy knowledge, skills and focus. It could help increase calls and pressure for wholesale reform of the failed environmental protection objectives supposedly incorporated into our regional economic development systems. And amongst other goals, and using its new unified voice, it could help call out the greenwashing and contradictory environmental policies of our political representatives. It could support the push for proper and effective environmental regulatory law. And it could call loudly for an improvement of democratic governance in the form of non-tokenistic citizen participation in and contribution to environmental decision making.

In completing this essay, I leave readers to reconsider the questions set out in the introduction.

- In the light of escalating regional environmental problems, could or should a long-term, common cause coalition of our independent environment support groups (ESGs) be formed to achieve better protection of our deteriorating environment?
- How might such a coalition be able to extend the existing, valuable, largely reactive environment support work, advocacy and community engagement efforts already conducted by ESGs and concerned citizens? How could it develop a more proactive advocacy model, aimed primarily at supporting institutional, system level environmental reforms?
- If formed, how might a common cause ESG coalition adopt new advocacy approaches to increase calls and pressure for reform of those failing institutions and system-level processes which currently help impede, not progress, the ability to create a more ecologically healthy, socially fairer and climate stable future here?
- What might be the alternative solutions to forming an ESG common cause coalition, or to using newer, system-level advocacy methods to help mobilise the wider community around escalating, long term, system-level generated environmental problems and drivers?

The HOPE organisation looks forward to receiving any comments or ideas you may have in response to this essay.