

Friends of the Maroochy Regional Botanic Gardens



PO Box 445 Buderim Q. 4556

President's Annual Report Tuesday 12th August 1997

In reviewing the first year of the Friends of the Maroochy Regional Botanic Gardens it must be said that it has been a very challenging time, certainly not what we believed was ahead of us when we attended our first meeting on 1st May, 1996. This meeting was attended by fifteen people, thirteen of whom became members. It was convened by Maroochy Shire Council's Manager of Parks and Gardens Ian Hamilton who served as Chairman until a full Executive Committee was elected in August, 1996. We are very grateful for Ian's help in our establishment and his on-going involvement. Fifteen months later we have over 150 individual members and nine member businesses and organisations, including The Society for Growing Australian Plants and the Queensland Nursery Industry Association.

In the 1996 Budget Maroochy Shire Council allocated \$1 million for the establishment of a Regional Botanic Garden. There followed a long process of site evaluation and selection. We were very fortunate in that Maroochy Shire Council allowed us to provide some genuine community input into this process. We believed that the site should do more than just fulfil the Australian Flora Foundation site selection criteria - it should also reflect the natural beauty of the Sunshine Coast.

By great good fortune Rob Haupt showed us the Tanawha site in July last year. Even at first viewing experienced members such as Ian Harris and Maurice Wilson felt that this land had "a little magic" and certainly could fulfill the Australian Flora Foundation Criteria. Rob Haupt worked for many weeks finding and opening up the old logging tracks and forming walking tracks to make it easily accessible. We then began a long period of "guiding" with visits from such people as Ross McKinnon, Pat. Comben, Ray Steward, Greg Downes and Mike Jessop who all confirmed that this site had the potential to be a "world-class Botanic Garden" (Ross McKinnon)

Over a period of many months we also showed most Councillors over the land and explained to them our vision for a very special botanic garden. With the expert help of member Elizabeth Shirley we submitted our assessment of three sites to Council with Tanawha as our preferred site. After extensive assessment of this and other available sites by Council's Consultant Laurie Smith B.Arch, Dip Land Arch, ARAIA FAILA, the Tanawha Site was purchased on February 18th 1997 as a Regional Botanic Garden - "Bushland Annexe" at a cost of \$750 000. This was \$250 000 less than the original asking price - we like to think that we played our part in saving ratepayers \$250 000! We thank former Mayor Mr Bob King and his Council for their foresight in purchasing this land.

We made a further submission to Council in April this year giving our suggestions for preliminary development of the Regional Botanic Garden. However, we were devastated in

June, 1997 with the possibility of the Tanawha site being sold. After tremendous community support and our presentation of Boyd McMillan's "Opportunity Concept" to Council on July 15th this difficulty was resolved. Maroochy Shire Council gave a commitment that the land will be retained and a management committee will be formed on which we will be well represented. Most Maroochy Shire Councillors have indicated their support for a Regional Botanic Garden. Unfortunately, no funding was allocated in this year's budget.

It hasn't all been serious! We had a very light hearted Brunch in Buderim Forest Park in November. This was attended by former Mayor Bob King and Mrs King and Mr & Mrs Bruce Laming. We have had "official" visits to Mt Coot-tha Botanic Garden and the Great Sandy Region Botanic Garden at Hervey Bay. I attended the National Conference of Friends of Botanic Gardens in Melbourne in April and Graham Wearne and myself attended the National Volunteer Guides Conference in Brisbane in May.

In June we were part of World Environment Day with a small display. In July we mounted a major display - complete with magnificent "sandstone" columns - at the Nambour Garden Expo. We were given a highly commended award for this - the first time a non-commercial display has won an award. This was a great team effort and once again shows the reservoir of ability we have within our organisation. These occasions are a tremendous amount of work but are essential in raising community awareness and understanding of the Regional Botanic Garden concept .

Our membership is made up of people with a very wide range of backgrounds, experience and expertise. This diversity has been our greatest strength and has enabled us to survive and benefit from the challenges of our first year. I believe we as a group have faced a very difficult time since our beginning and we have come through it with a strong bond between us and a determination to always focus on our goals while remaining non-political and non-confrontational. We now have a magnificent site, we have a strong dedicated organisation and we have begun a good working relationship with Maroochy Shire Council. This is a solid foundation for our next year.

I personally consider it to be a great privilege to have been your President during this time. I thank you sincerely for your confidence and support at all times. I also thank Vice President Allan Maxwell, Secretary Shelley Toomey and Treasurer Nicki Rooney for the way they have performed their duties even though they all have heavy family and work commitments. Most of us joined the "Friends" because of a wish to begin planting trees. No trees have yet been planted. What we have planted instead is a seed - a seed of the vision that has already germinated and is growing and will one day flower into a unique Botanic Garden that will contribute to the quality of life of all generations who follow us.



Maureen Sheargold
President