

**We The People**  
Program 46  
The Riparian Forest



Here is an unusual word you may not have heard before. The word is *Riparian* from the Latin *riparius*. It means “that frequents river banks”. Now this may sound obscure but it’s not, as it refers to the type of forest that grows on either side of a river or stream. This fringe of riparian forest is enormously important to the health of the waterway as it stabilises the banks, aids water ecology, intercepts sediments, nutrients, pesticides and other materials. It provides cover for wildlife, lowers the temperature by shading, slows overflow and is simply beautiful. We have all seen farmland cleared of all trees save that ribbon of forest either side of a meandering river in the country. Without the broader riparian forest, rivers and streams are stressed and overloaded, lack marine life and look unfulfilled.

We are blessed to have the ubiquitous green behind the gold here on the Gold Coast with ancient Beech forests and so many wooded hills and subtropical parks. While these are only remnants they provide a back drop to an otherwise ecologically inhospitable urban Gold Coast. The forests we tear down are crucial for our survival and that of our wild life as planet earth is all one enormous green house that provides clean air, water and soil. To the credit of the Gold Coast City Council we have a plan or strategy for nature conservation which while modest is at least an attempt to try and reclaim and protect the natural environment. Now for those more attuned to the commercial health of the Gold Coast consider the vast potential for eco tourism into the future. The answer does not lie in casinos or love boats.

Now to the point of this narrative. The new Mayor Tom Tate is full of energy but is also the new kid on the block and as yet doesn’t seem to realise that ‘we the people’ have a right to say what happens. I am hopeful he can stop the rot in the bureaucracy but he won’t be able to if he doesn’t listen to the people. His latest cost cutting exercise is to stop any further land acquisition for open space and conservation and that includes the green behind the gold and riparian forests. Each time we receive a rates notice we pay a levy of about \$15 which accumulates into a fund used for the acquisition of land. That’s a lot of money and the cash flow also supports loans to acquire more green space. The mayor in his recent budget speech said “we already have 10,000 acres of bush land set aside for nature conservation and it doesn’t make sense to increase our borrowings to buy more.....” Is that right Mr Mayor. Well I think 10,000 acres in terms of the size of the Gold Coast is miniscule and its short sighted and irresponsible not to acquire conservation land for our future and for our children, grand children and visitors. The Mayor goes on to say “Importantly many of the budget savings are not just single year gains” I guess that could mean a reduction or cessation of conservation land all together. Bear in mind too that Tom Tate didn’t have a published environmental policy when he ran for Mayor so it’s probably time he contacted environmental groups like Gecko and learnt a bit. They are waiting for your call Tom.

My advice is that a levy is a special prescribed tax and the money cannot be siphoned off into consolidated revenue. The place to start saving money is to get rid of Councils mickey mouse computer system which is absorbing massive amounts of rate payers money which one estimate puts at 2.2 million a month. If the thing ever does work the annual license fee alone is likely to be well over \$10 million a year just for using it plus all kinds of other huge fees the CEO doesn’t talk about. Mr Mayor did you know Council just advertised for another three IT people to run the digital lemon at a cost of at least \$350,000 yearly. On and on it goes but it seems you place no store in conservation land. Surely we can save more Riparian forests and precious green space which is far more important. Generations to come will thank us and the Gold Coast will have what money can’t buy and what others around the world will envy.

**Until next time this is Kent Bayley**