

# President's Reports for 2000

## **Kim Neubecker's Report for the first half of 2000 – from AIDA's April 2001 Newsletter**

Welcome members and guests to the Aireys Inlet and District Association Annual General Meeting. I would like to start my report with the good news that we began the year 2000 with an energetic and revitalised committee that has stood us in good stead through the usual minefield of curly issues. One of the first of these issues was the Hartley St. proposal – seven freehold beach houses in a kind of cluster development. Understandably many neighbouring residents were alarmed at the density of the development – in this area block sizes are generous, and the indigenous ironbark forest and the accompanying flora largely intact. The developer was proposing block sizes of the order of 600 m<sup>2</sup>. The new planning laws, which at this time were not ratified, were proposing a minimum of 800 m<sup>2</sup>. The Shire Planning Department took the view that the development was low key and well-designed, and gave the developer its support. AIDA took the view that the development was setting a density precedent, and that it was contrary to the Shire's soon-to-be-adopted planning laws. Along with the residents who initially objected to the proposal we opposed it. The town planner whose services we engaged suggested that our case would be strengthened by an appearance at the VCAT hearing of an arborist to argue against the development on the grounds of excess vegetation removal.

Interestingly, the Shire, who were by now locked into supporting the development, got wind of this, and at the hearing the developer also had an arborist – to argue in the affirmative. The development was approved unamended, save for the fact that the developer was bound to pay a bond, refundable upon the completion of the project, and contingent upon the trees on the site being left intact.

For me personally two issues came to light from this experience. The first and larger issue was that we lost the battle but won the war. Too often organisations such as AIDA are forced into a reactive stance in these situations. However, because of well-researched and thorough submissions being made to the Shire's Planning Department by AIDA and other organisations and ratepayers during the overhaul of the planning laws, we now have in place recommendations that would not support a development of such density in that area. While recommendations of this type do not give a guaranteed outcome, it is my experience that the Shire is more willing to commit staff, time and funds to fight

proposals that contravene their planning laws, as opposed to those that merely skirt the edges of what is deemed appropriate. The arbitration process can be a gamble, and they would rather not back a losing horse when large amounts of Shire funds are involved. Those of you who have dealt with interim or proposed planning documents would be familiar with the amount of work involved in reading, deciphering and contributing to these vast tomes. This pro-active rather than reactive stance is what I believe an organisation like AIDA can be best at – local government at a grass-roots level. With sympathetic local councillors, and strength of numbers – and therefore influence – organisations such as ours can have a strong voice, and much can be achieved. This goes some way towards easing the cynicism I feel when watching the sharks in dollar-sign sunglasses circling our coastal towns looking for ‘development opportunities’.

The other point I wish to highlight from the VCAT hearing is the need for continuing education to promote awareness of the importance, fragility and diversity of the indigenous vegetation. Both arborists in their role as expert witnesses could literally not see the wood for the trees. What we really needed was a botanist. There was much mention of tree preservation, fenced-off areas and what building machinery may or may not do to inadvertently damage trees. There was no mention made of the huge diversity of annual and perennial indigenous vegetation that could well be dormant at the time of site inspection. This is particularly true of orchid species. For people who only holiday here in the period from Christmas to Easter this is particularly valid. Unless you are here in the wetter months you would never witness the veritable garden of beautiful and diverse plant life that becomes dormant or senesces for the dry months of summer and autumn. Within this is a treasure-trove of plant species – diversity that, through ignorance, will be lost to us.

On this note, the slow-moving project to refurbish the Allen Noble Sanctuary, initiated by myself and Jeanette Spittle from the Shire, is set to accelerate this year, with the imminent tendering for the construction of the boardwalk and walking track around the road-bounded perimeter of the Sanctuary. As you will have read in the newsletter, the Landscape Plan was displayed for public comment earlier in the year, and has now been adopted. Next week I will meet with Jeanette and our local indigenous plant nurseryman Geoff Clark to draw up a species list for him to propagate in readiness for winter planting. The capital works component of the project, being a Shire concern, is subject to their timelines. Some of us saw a window of opportunity when the Sanctuary, due to drought, was nearly empty – an opportunity that has now been lost. Historically we can expect levels to be low again in autumn.

Finally I would like to report that, in the middle of last year, after two years as vice president and three and a half years as president of AIDA, the pressures of four children, a business and a University degree loomed large. There was a quiet moment in the affairs of AIDA, and I took the opportunity to step down. Of course the quiet moment lasted for only a couple of minutes, but the decision to step down was a necessity. It was only possible because of the input and energy of the rest of the committee – both the long-term members and the new. I would particularly like to thank Craig Cunningham and Tim Gibson who jointly took on the role of vice presidents – their involvement is much valued by myself and fellow committee member Jane Grant. For the benefit of anyone who is curious, whilst no longer a committee member, I remain part of AIDA, and I intend to maintain an involvement in AIDA issues, in particular the completion of the Allen Noble Sanctuary Project. On that note I would now like to hand the meeting over to Tim Gibson, to fill you in on AIDA's work in the second half of last year.

### **Tim Gibson's President's Report for the second half of 2000 – from AIDA's April 2001 Newsletter**

As Kim has already said, this has been a year of transition for AIDA, and particularly for the AIDA committee. I cannot let this moment pass without making special reference to three of our retiring long- serving committee members – Kim herself, Brian Williams and Angus McKenzie. All three have served the AIDA committee, and the Aireys Inlet community in general, very well over a number of years. In Brian's case, his service has extended well over twenty years – really a magnificent contribution. He has been in charge of our membership records for much of this time, and has built up a remarkable collection of papers and memorabilia concerning AIDA. I believe he has volunteered (possibly in collaboration with Peter Thompson) to make use of this collection to write a history of AIDA – if this is unexpurgated, it should make a most interesting read!

Kim found it necessary to stand down from the position of President of AIDA in the middle of last year, when she began her degree studies at Burnley Horticultural College. These, combined with raising her young family, and her work as a gardener, prevent her from making the whole-hearted efforts on behalf of AIDA that have been so characteristic of Kim, and have been invaluable to our cause. She has been on the committee for about seven years, and for the last two years has been a most hard-working President. It is good to know that

she is to continue doing some work for AIDA – in particular, she will maintain a close interest in the Noble Sanctuary project.

Angus has been a committee member for eleven years, and for several years now has been our Vice-President. During his term on the committee he has made a number of valuable suggestions, and he has acted as a very effective link between AIDA and the local Fire Brigade. [At this point the chairman foreshadowed a motion – ‘that this meeting records its appreciation of the outstanding contributions that Brian, Angus and Kim have made to AIDA’. This motion was later carried by acclamation.]

The other retiring committee member is Kevin Riley, who has been a good contributor over the last year, and we are indeed sorry that he is unable to continue in this role in 2001. And I should make mention of another significant change in the committee make-up during the year, when our long-serving Treasurer, Guy Tuddenham, resigned from that position (though not from committee membership), and was replaced by a newly-co-opted member, Russell Hansen. Russell had some big boots to fill, as Guy has given great service as Treasurer, but has quickly shown that he is a very competent money-manager, and he is indeed a valuable addition to our ranks. It was a suggestion of Russell’s that AIDA should enrol in VicRoad’s ‘Adopt a Highway’ scheme, and organise regular clean-ups along the Great Ocean Road through Aireys Inlet township – a suggestion which was enthusiastically supported by the committee. We hope to be starting this project soon.

On a sad note, I must place on record our sad losses in the last few weeks, with the deaths of Arthur Reilly and of Dorothy Williams, two long-time active supporters of AIDA. We shall miss them both very much.

One of the main issues that your committee has been actively involved in during 2000 was of course the nature of the planned development of the ‘Lighthouse Precinct’. Jane Grant has acted as the AIDA representative on the SPLTPAC Committee, which, as you know, was set up by the Shire to provide broad community input to the decision-making process on this contentious issue. And the AIDA committee in general tried to maintain a good liaison with the Shire councillors, and with the three representatives of our local ward in particular. It is our belief that the Shire Council has, in the end, made a commendable series of decisions about the future of this important area. Lighthouse Road and Federal Street are to be sealed, and some parking will be permitted in Federal Street. However our main objective – the preservation of the Step Beach car park in essentially its present area and condition – has been achieved. And there

will be improvements in signage in the area and the development of walking tracks. We shall have to carefully monitor the traffic and parking patterns that develop in the precinct once the lighthouse has been opened to visitors on a daily basis. We will also need to be concerned about the changes that will have to be made to the intersection of Inlet Crescent and the Great Ocean Road, which is a dangerous intersection as it stands, and could become even more dangerous.

At last year's AGM a motion was passed that the committee should investigate the possibility of appointing a paid part-time co-ordinator to assist with the administration of the Association, and to look for fund-raising opportunities. Your committee drew up a list of potential duties for a co-ordinator, and advertised for applicants. Several good candidates applied for the position. Following interviews of the best applicants, it was decided to appoint Mrs Mary Lord as AIDA co-ordinator, and she took up her duties in May.

Mary's tenure as co-ordinator lasted seven months, as she resigned from the position in December. She served the committee well, doing many of the administrative tasks, and helping to organise our 'getting-to-know-you' wine and cheese afternoon in September. However it is fair to say that neither Mary nor the committee found the situation fully satisfactory, and one of the first tasks of the 2001 committee will be to review the possible appointment of a new administrative assistant, probably paid on an hourly basis, rather than by a fixed monthly honorarium.

During the year the committee has continued to monitor proposed residential developments in the area, and to make strong representations in those cases where the development seems inappropriate. As Kim has already mentioned, our representations concerning the Hartley St. development were unsuccessful, much to our regret. As in previous years we have continued to press for 'minimal impact' development of the Painkalac valley and the Bimbadeen-Wybellenna sites. We have had some success in the former case, while plans for the latter development have been endorsed by the Planning Minister (subject to strict environmental controls) and have been returned to the Shire Council for final approval. We are unable to make further direct representations to the Shire, but will continue to lobby individual councillors, and we urge you as concerned individuals to do the same.

Finally, I should mention that the committee has decided to revise and update AIDA's 'Aims and Policies' leaflet. Copies of the new version will be mailed to all members with an AIDA newsletter in 2001.