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connecting_the_cape

Bringing you what's new
(and news) from Cape York
Aboriginal communities

— compiled & edited by Christine Howes

Last week David Peachey and Nova Peris visited Lockhart River in what Mayor Rodney Accoom recalls was the first visit by mainstream sports stars to the small community



Mayor Rodney Accoom from Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council

We've had a visit from the Strong Community Life mob which included David Peachey and Nova Peris.

There was also two blokes from Troy Cassar-Daly's band who 'played up' with some of the local musos in town.

I reckon it was a good thing they came, it was the first time something like this had happened in Lockhart.

When I grew up here, as a young boy I played footy and basketball, but no one from the mainstream came up to see us.

We used to travel to Weipa, Aurukun, Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Coen, just to play footy with each other.

If we got injured, nothing.

We didn't get paid, we just tried to make our community proud.

If we won when we came back we'd hear people singing out, just happy to hear we'd won.

So it's a good thing that David and these others were here.

There's two bands in our community as well, they just used to play against each other, but recently someone came up from Cairns and has recorded them in their studio there.

They were just up here two weeks ago to record some more.

The bands have been writing their own songs and they have mixed it up with some culture, so it's good to see that happening.

I wish all this had happened when I was a young fella!

In other news, at the end of last month we opened a new office in Cairns, especially for some of our financial staff to work from.

It's good for us, it means that when any of our workers put purchase orders in, they get sent down there and our staff can look for the right material at the best price.

That's next door to the Kowanyama office, which I think has been there for nearly ten years now.

Council has three 'battles' on its hands at the moment, firstly our community's housing rents are about to go up to 25% of every household's income.

I don't see how our people can afford that, they don't get much as it is and the only store we have here is very expensive.

I heard it was because there are rich people in the cities living in housing commission

homes, so what they're doing is bringing those problems from the cities into communities.

We're also pretty wild about Wild Rivers over here as well.

We were told it wouldn't affect our mob camping on the rivers but in point of fact it was a different story.

We have a developer at the moment who's interested in offering 150-200 jobs for our people as well, but someone from Wild Rivers told him 'blackfellas can't work'.

He said he wanted to prove them wrong but they're trying to stop him.

So we're backing the Cape York Land Council and Balkanu all the way in this fight.

And lastly, we want to tell people we're not giving up hope on our canteen yet, we're still fighting to get it back.

As soon as the canteen was closed people here went straight into drugs and making their own brew, which is killing them, so I want the community to know we're still fighting and we won't give up hope.



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Professor argues that Wild Rivers policy lacks proper science

A leading authority on tropical river systems claims that Queensland's Wild Rivers legislation was assembled without enough scientific consultation.

Professor Stuart Bunn, the director of the Australian Rivers Institute (ARI) at Griffith University, alleges the scientific community has not been able to give governments the detailed science on tropical rivers they need.

He says this meant the State Government's decision to lock up the Lockhart, Stewart and Archer rivers on Cape York earlier this month was made without the appropriate level of consultation.

"We've had some discussions with them about our

interests in having some input into that process but up until now the process of selecting catchments and the whole development of the legislation has not been one that's really required or incorporated a lot of that," he told an ABC's News Online.

The Government's decision to declare the three Wild Rivers on April 3 has produced stark divisions between a range of Indigenous and environmental groups.

The plan was welcomed by Wik Projects Ltd., the Aurukun Uniting Church, Indigenous leader Murundoo Yanner and the Wilderness Society.

But Noel Pearson angrily left his position with the Cape

York Institute to fight the Government over the issue, accusing Premier Anna Bligh of robbing Indigenous people of their economic rights.

Professor Bunn's comments throw some doubt over claims by the Government of extensive consultation, although he is at pains to point out that the fault lies as much with the science community as with the Government.

"There's not a lot of science being done, so pulling a lot of the information together and getting it into a form that's useful is one challenge and the second one is we've [the scientific community's] not been really proactive in the past at taking what little information we have

and getting it into the policy area," he said.

"They're [governments] willing to take whatever science advice we can give them right now. The reality is decisions are being made and whatever information we have is stuff that we have to get in there and make sure that policies that are developed are based on the best information."

The anger coming from Noel Pearson and others over a perceived lack of consultation shows how important it is to engage Cape York communities in the river conservation process, Professor Bunn said.

"A high priority is to identify what are the assets

and values that people hold very dearly and how are they distributed across the north, and use that information to help guide where are places that are of high conservation significance or cultural significance," he said.

"It doesn't necessarily mean you have to lock up every catchment and turn them into places where no-one's allowed to go because that's not a good form of management either.

"Whatever process we use to protect them, if we don't engage the communities that are living there and the ones that are going to be affected by this, then they won't be managed properly into the future."

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