

Ordinary Meeting

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 25 May, 2021
Location: Council Chambers, City Administrative Building, Bridge Road, Nowra
Time: 5.00pm

Membership (Quorum - 7)
All Councillors

Addendum Agenda

Mayoral Minute

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MM21.13 Mayoral Minute - Condolence Motion for Charlie Weir1

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HPERM Ref: D21/208342

Recommendation

That Council write to the Weir Family and Shoalhaven River Watch expressing condolences at the passing of Charlie Weir.

Details

Charlie Weir has left the river and will be missed by so many who have experienced his passion for more than 25 years. Charlie's legacy is one that will continue to give the gift of life to the Shoalhaven River and the plants and animals that have benefited from the extensive mangrove replanting programme that Charlie played an instrumental part in. Thank you to Charlie's family who shared their precious time with Shoalhaven residents.

Many people have had the pleasure of getting in the Riverwatch boat with Charlie and being brought to a gentle understanding about the importance of the River ecosystem. I attended Charlie's funeral with many of his colleagues who fondly recall memories of Charlie that often related to the boat!

Charlie had a deep love of the Shoalhaven River, having grown up at Riversdale and fished the river throughout his working life. During this time, he witnessed the deterioration of the river, so in his retirement, he worked tirelessly to restore the river to good health.

Charlie was a founder of Shoalhaven Riverwatch in the early 1980s and was a passionate advocate for the next 40 years.

Charlie was a thorn in the side of many politicians and bureaucrats, fighting numerous battles to protect the river. Some of the things he championed were fighting:

- pollution of the river through industrial discharge into the river, an issue Riverwatch took to the Land and Environment Court in 1992
- erosion caused by bad agricultural practices such as allowing cattle to graze the riverbanks
- riverbank erosion caused by wake boats
- and re-establishing mangroves along the river – the nursery for fish.

In October 1997, Charlie responded to an advertisement placed in the local paper by Alan Lugg of NSW Fisheries asking for volunteers to come and plant mangroves. Charlie went that day and so began his "retirement". From that point on Charlie was devoted to the planting of mangroves on the river. It wasn't just the seven days a week, sun-up to sundown time spent on the river, it was very much his application to understanding what was required for the successful planting of mangroves.

He pioneered mangrove propagation and planting techniques, undertook trials and just tried things out until he worked out what worked! He wrote a book about his findings which became the bible of mangrove propagation!

Charlie worked with and inspired people and groups including school groups, LEAP programs, Green Army workers, Work for the Dole participants and anyone who would help him plant trees! He is responsible for the planting of:

- In excess of 100,000 mangroves
- 25,000 Casuarina trees, most of which were propagated in his back yard.

As Charlie started to slow down six or seven years ago (he was now in his mid 80s) he became concerned about the future of Riverwatch and reached out for help. That began a rejuvenation of Riverwatch with the injection of some new energy and direction. The membership of Riverwatch during this time has blossomed and working bees became regular and well attended.

At our last working bee in March this year, Charlie came along at the age of 92. We were able to take him and school friend Peter Hanson senior, up the river to look over his legacy – the mangroves he loved! Also, that day, one of the new brigade, Peter Jirgens, who is proudly this years' Shoalhaven Citizen of the Year and was showing off his medallion. When he handed the medallion to Charlie, the response was "Yeah, I think I have got one of those." Charlie earned and deserved every public recognition that come his way, and some of these were significant awards including:

- 2003 Winner NSW Individual Landcare of the Year – "Winning that thing there, that's the biggest excitement I've ever had," he said.
- 2004 Runner up National Individual Landcarer of the Year
- 2011 NSW Maritime Certificate of Commendation
- 2015 Volunteer Award Winner of Shoalhaven Superheros

Charlie will be greatly missed, however his incredible legacy lives on. What we have today on the Southern bank of the Shoalhaven River from Numbaa Island through to Pig Island is a mangrove forest which we hope one day will be formally named "Charlie's Forest". If you are travelling east along Bolong Road in the vicinity of the fishing platform just before Broughton Creek, then take the time to notice the forest on the other side of the river. These trees have all been planted over the last 25 years.