



Save Our Macleay River Activities Report December 2014

As a result of community meetings concerned with mining contamination on the Macleay River, SOMR became an incorporated association about 14 months ago. In this time we have made significant progress.

Since the very beginning in January last year, SOMR has organised a total of eight public information events in Bellbrook, Gladstone and Kempsey, including two workshops by the Environmental Defenders Office on legal issues. Presentations were made by local speakers, including the Kempsey Shire Mayor and Dunghutti Elders as well as by experts on geology and mine remediation and social impact of mining. Two of the meetings were presented by scientists from the University of New England.

We have built a relationship of trust with Hillgrove Mine; we have had regular meetings with the Operations Manager and the Environmental and Safety Manager. They have agreed to give us access to data on water quality and regular updates on operations at the mine. Committee members have had the opportunity for an extensive tour of the mine, highlighting environmental safeguards and safe working practices. The current operations are an improvement on the previous status of care and maintenance.

Twice, SOMR has organised "Paddle on the Macleay" in order to promote awareness of the beauty and importance of the Macleay River as a community resource. The first paddle was upriver near Bellbrook in 2013, and in 2014 we combined with Kempsey Shire Council's River Festival.

SOMR has been active in monitoring exploration activity at Halls Peak. This led to Precious Metal Resources (PMR) an exploration drilling company, being investigated by the Dept of Trade and Industry for a breach of licence: failure to appropriately consult the community. Subsequently PMR did a shuffle of Exploration Licences and Executive members, resulting in the Exploration Licences being transferred to Sovereign Gold. The fact that \$90,000 in NSW Government funds have recently been granted for further exploration at Halls Peak is one of the current issue the committee are investigating. There are questions about who is in fact the holder of the exploration licences and therefore responsible for any environmental impact in the Macleay River catchment.

SOMR activity resulted in identifying poor work practices in the maintenance of a derelict mine at Gibson's Open Cut Mine; communication with the Derelict Mines Office and the Environmental Protection Agency led to a quick response to remediate the problem. The maintenance of derelict mines is another area of ongoing activity for SOMR to monitor and address.

SOMR has developed positive relationships with a number of government departments, being invited for example to participate in the Macleay Contamination Working Group, an interdepartmental group investigating the effect of historic mining practices on the health of the Macleay River.

SOMR representatives were invited by the Oyster Growers to the launch of their Environmental Management Scheme. As a stakeholder, SOMR has also been invited to join the Clybucca Working Group which is currently being formed by North Coast Local Land Services (NCLLS) in association with Kempsey Shire Council, Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), and Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

SOMR has also developed a strong relationship with scientists from the University of New England, who have been monitoring the impact of mining contamination since the late 1990's. As mentioned above, UNE scientists presented to two community meetings, one upriver at Bellbrook and the other downriver at Gladstone to inform Macleay residents of the current scientific understanding of the impact of contamination of the river. Supporting the UNE in funding applications and maintaining their engagement with the Macleay River is another ongoing area of activity for SOMR.

SOMR is a member of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and Lock the Gate.

To keep the public informed about issues of concern and the activities, SOMR maintains a Website and Facebook site and holds an information stall at local markets. A Bush Dance was held recently as a fundraiser and community event in conjunction with our first AGM.