

Battle of Parking - *Have we won?*

An opinion by Mark Edwards

Congratulations and well done to everyone who turned up for Saturday's protests on Macleay & Russell Islands. Through demonstrating in force and showing island unity, you have managed to achieve a significant stand in our struggle for representation into the issues that affect our islands and our way of life.

On the following Monday morning, Frank Bradley and I met with the Mayor Melva Hobson, Council CEO Gary Stevenson and Council General Manager Finance Raymond Turner. Although the focus of the meeting related to financial receipts and expenditure on the islands, we also took the time to discuss Saturday's meetings. I was told that the Council have decided to listen to our concerns and are to embark on a process of reviewing the way in which the Council will engage with the island community. However what is alarming is there is **no official statement** from Council that parking fees will not be introduced. In the Council's media release dated 10 November 2008, the Mayor and Councillor Townsend make statements of working with us but **no statement that parking fees will not happen!** At this stage, all we have achieved is a stay of execution. The Council must now come out officially and state that the parking fee issue is off the table and they will all look towards other alternatives. **Let's not be hoodwinked!** We must also keep the fight going for better roads and infrastructure and keep the pressure on council to work in the interest of the Bay Islands. If the Council state they are now going to work with us then now is the time for the council to put the money where their mouths is and also get funding from State & Federal governments.



Preparing for the next battle.

In preparing for our next battle, I believe the island residents and ratepayers should prepare for two courses of action.

The first action is for our community to work with Council, assist in providing a range of potential solutions for our problems and participate in the process of determining what can be achieved in our desired timeframes and how the funding is secured. On Monday evening 13th November I attended a formation meeting of the **SMBI Forum** which has the intent to become the mouthpiece of island issues.

The structure of the SMBI Forum will not allow for any of you to have a vote unless you are a member of an existing organisation. I personally find this difficult to accept as I know there are many people who would like their opinions heard but do not care to join the existing organisations for various reasons. I would like the SMBI Forum to become successful and considerate of everyone's opinion including you, the person now reading this flyer. **In order to have a voice for our future, I am in the process of establishing a group, (yet to be given a name), in which you can join so that you can have a say in your future.** The positive side is that there are some people on the SMBI Forum who are doing good work and we need these people to be part of the solution and offer good governance.

The second action is taking control of our future. We should organise and prepare ourselves for the need which will eventuate that requires us to act in the way that we did on Saturday; with unity and public protest. **We need to ensure that we have the organisation, resilience, and resources to protest**

our demands on the mainland and in the backyard of those levels of government that are crucial to our funding. Our new group will focus on action, not a talk fest nor a group for the self importance of those who established it. It is not about me, it is about all of us and I am happy for others to take control. We must take meaningful action and not become a hot air forum. It is time we begin our public struggle for justice from all levels of government and for the State government to accept that they created the problem to begin with so they should be part of the solution.

We need to be a lobby group with clout that will enable us to engage ourselves with our political leaders on the understanding that they need to work with us. If anything has taught us over the last 35 years is that **no one out there is going to do us any favours.** The time of just talking has passed.

The establishment of an action group will give us something that has not been done in the past, the ability to take our fight to the mainland. The only thing we need is YOU! Without you, we cannot organise the resources and form support groups to take our political struggle to the vestiges of government. We need to be there when negotiations break down and get them back on track. We need to form a group of like minded people that are determined not to let the past continue but to break free of Council inequity, over taxation and over regulation of the islands.

We will be loud, we will be seen, and we will be a force to be reckoned with. We need to learn how to conduct our protests in a way that garners respect and support from the wider community whilst also making good TV coverage. This new group to be formed will have a different strategy than what is being offered by other island organisations. Just stop for a second and think about the people power effect on Saturday 8th November. Do we want to continue with our dusty roads, new parking fees, higher rates and all the other problems we are faced with? Or do you want our islands to be the best they can be. Then organised people power might just be the way for us to be heard. We need a new way forward, we need action not words, we need to fight for our basic rights for equity in Redland City. We need infrastructure that the rest of the City takes for granted and we need to take a stand and say, "No More Unfair Treatment!". Let's fight for equity, no matter the cost or burden, because not to fight is to accept higher rates, more fees, less services and treatment as second class citizens.

We are not subservient to the Redland City Council and we must fight for justice and equity.

Will YOU join me in this fight?

Over the coming weeks I will attend to the legal requirements of establishing an incorporated body that is all about taking our fight to the mainland. There won't be boring monthly meetings that are full of puffed up people telling you how clever they are. We will be an action group however there will be a place for everyone. You can join and just listen or you can be very active and involved. The choice will be yours. I am not asking you to join now, just start to consider it.



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Don't complain about the bad conditions if you are not prepared to fight to change them.