

ELECTION 1990

A perfect outcome for environment

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

by Phillip Toyne

The most difficult and close Federal election is now behind us. The Labor Government has been narrowly returned, on Democrat and Green preferences. Ted Mack is elected as an Independent.

In terms of the environment, this is a perfect outcome. The Coalition, with policies which were inferior across a range of issues has been defeated. The Democrats, with the best environment policies, have gained a huge increase in votes, picking up most of the swing away from the ALP. The Government has just made it back, knowing that the environment was a key factor.

There are several comments to make about this very successful campaign.

Firstly, your elected ACF Council voted by a large majority to endorse Democrats (or Greens) followed by Labor. This followed an exhaustive evaluation of the

policies, positions and records of the Parties, and their answers to 93 propositions put to them in a questionnaire. Critical differences between the Coalition and Labor became obvious in areas such as uranium mining, protection of national parks, national estate and world heritage areas. Nowhere was this clearer than over the protection of Kakadu, where the Coalition supported an immediate start to mining at Coronation Hill, in Stage 3 of Kakadu National Park. They supported the exploration and mining of the area previously known as the 'conservation zone'. This area was, amidst much controversy, returned to the Park by the Federal Government late last year. The Coalition also favored mineral evaluation of Stage 2 of Kakadu, which is already listed as World Heritage, adding that they did not intend to permit mining in the area, after this evaluation was completed. Finally, they opposed Aboriginal ownership of Uluru National Park and would transfer control of it

and Kakadu from ANPWS to the NT Government.

With these, and many other gaps between the parties, I believe the decision of ACF Council to reject the Coalition's position was somewhat inevitable.

The Foundation was then left with the decision as to whether it should take the extra step of endorsing particular parties. This is a major controversy which we must debate and resolve. Personally, I doubt whether it is an appropriate or justified position for an environmental lobby to assume. I acknowledge that this 'high risk - high benefit' strategy has worked. However, it leaves the Foundation open to the obvious accusation that we are locked into a party alignment.

Of course, the best solution is to give high priority to the 'greening' of the Coalition. If they can be encouraged to substantially overhaul their policies, then the pressure to endorse alternative parties will fall away. I am determined to put considerable effort into this task. It is depressing to hear some spokespeople for the Opposition continuing to deny that the environment was a significant election issue or that their environment policies were inadequate.

Finally, I am proud of the outstanding work of ACF and TWS staff and volunteers in this campaign. Hundreds of hours were spent on preparing ballots, election broadsheets, leafleting, and staffing polling booths. The keen willingness to put so much effort into this campaign is certainly one of the great strengths of both ACF and TWS.

For those who contributed their time, talent or money, may I offer you my thanks. □



Phillip Toyne and Alistair Graham launch joint ACF/TWS environment campaign □ Photo: Janusz Molinski

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