

Werribee Residents AGAINST TOXIC DUMP



ANNUAL REPORT

1998-99

Presented by Joanne Ryan
Chairperson

I suppose that there is really no need for an annual report. We won: we defeated CSR and the Kennett Government, and everyone knows it.

Nevertheless, there are some important things that we need to decide in light of our victory.

I have circulated a brief chronology of our campaign and everyone can see the immense amount of work, and the imaginative tactics, that were used to take us to victory. It was a victory that involved many thousands of people and that culminated in the massive meeting of 15,000 residents at the Racecourse. Although it took another 6 months after that meeting for CSR to give in, the conclusion was foregone once 15,000 people showed such strong and determined opposition.

We should remember that it took 2 years of non-stop work to get to the stage that so many people were willing to come to such a meeting. We won because of the patient work, the clear strategies and the strong commitment shown by WRATD. I must thank you all for the tremendous effort you put in.

But perhaps the most admirable aspect of our victory is that we are still here. We are still fighting to improve our environment and to assist others to improve their environment. We could have taken our ball and gone home, flushed with success and self-satisfaction. Instead we established an environment centre – a centre aimed at promoting environmental issues for the whole western region: a centre aimed at uniting the regional community to make sure that attempts to dump on the west will fail.

But also a centre to celebrate and protect the environmental assets of this region. We want, as we tried throughout the toxic dump campaign, to be proactive. We want to not only oppose that which is wrong, but also to facilitate and create that which is right. The Western Region Environment Centre will provide the only vehicle of its kind in this region, and perhaps in all Victoria. It aims not only to protect, in the most strenuous way possible, our environmental heritage, but also to rehabilitate and enhance the many environmental assets that the West has.

As chairperson I am proud to have been a part of one of the most successful campaigns seen for some time. I am equally proud of the way that Werribee residents didn't settle for a simple Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) campaign but worked to develop a Not In Anyone's Back Yard strategy. The support that WRATD gave to the residents of Lyndhurst, Yarraville, Spotswood,

Niddrie, and as far away as Western Australia and Queensland, was terrific. The work that went into developing alternative policies for the EPA and of establishing alternative technologies for managing toxic waste, not only kept our opponents on the back foot, but also provided a solid basis for the policy review that we forced the Government to undertake this year.

Similarly, the work that went into the National Hazardous Waste Policy Framework that WRATD promoted in July last year has created a basis for more substantial national intervention, especially once the Senate balance of power has altered.

There are many major achievements over the past twelve months and I can't begin to outline them all. As I said, see the chronology that we have prepared.

But some activities are worth remembering, such as the wonderful RAMSAR petition. More than 95,000 signatures were gathered in less than 4 weeks – that's probably a Victorian or Australian record. And the bus trip to Canberra to deliver the petition to Senator Hill was a very memorable event, not only for those who went, but also for the many schools and community groups that sponsored them. It was a tremendous sign of community spirit and determination.

In a totally different vein was the Toxic Dump Ball – a wonderful event which we would all have loved even if no money was raised. But it also raised more than \$10,000 for the campaign.

And perhaps most important of all, in terms of our overall strategy, was the overwhelming support and organisational effort involved in the picket organising. The numerous picket working groups, the non-violence training sessions and the widespread support they received within the community, became a "last line of defence" that was so strong the mere reporting of it to CSR made them anxious. From May last year onwards the pickets were a spectre that haunted CSR and the Kennett Government. No amount of PR or advertising could overcome the community strength embodied in the picket organisation.

There were many other memorable events, from the CSR boycott and the activity in marginal seats through to the rallies and the street theatre turning Jeff's Hole quarry into a toxic dump.

The task ahead of us, apart from getting some rest from the hectic pace of the past 12 months, is to make the Western Region Environment Centre as successful as the toxic dump campaign from which it grew. This means that we must strengthen the networks we have built and we must take our activities to the local government bodies in the other municipalities. We need to listen and learn about their issues and their strengths and problems, and we need to work together to make the Western Region a major example of environmental responsibility and sustainability.

We can do it – and for our children, we MUST do it.

Joanne Ryan
Chairperson

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