

SFAG CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 2006.

This is my inaugural Chairman's Report on the activity of the SFAG during our first year of existence as an incorporated body.

When I started to record all the activities undertaken by your committee into this report it makes me realise what an enormous commitment it has been for a small group of volunteers. However, we all have a vested interest in solving this problem so hopefully the effort will be worthwhile in the long run.

Following our inaugural AGM that was held in Sept 2005, we commenced our activities with high hopes for achievement, but also a steely determination that we would overcome any obstacles that presented themselves.

Raise Profile of Stable Fly Issue:

One of our goals for the year was to raise the profile of the SFAG, which would subsequently raise the profile of the Stable Fly problem.

I think we could say that we were extremely successful in achieving this aim, although some mistakes were made early-on due to a slight over-exuberance on our part, to get our message through. We ruffled some feathers within the Shire, which wasn't our intention, but I feel that we are back on track with a strong working relationship with our partner in this issue.

We went about raising the Stable Fly profile by a number of methods. The initial thrust was to follow up on the publicity that had already been generated around the issue in the media.

Our Deputy Chair, Rod Withnell, took it upon himself to produce an extremely professional Media Kit, with Photos accompanied by written explanations of the problem, as well as a DVD with still photos as well as some video footage.

This package was initially financed from Rod's own pocket while we waited for the assistance that came through from the Gingin Shire (and also to a smaller extent the Dept of Ag, via Bob Paulin).

We sent this package to a number of local media outlets as well as many of the politicians that we felt had the capacity to help us with the problem.

This was very successful in lifting the profile of the issue, as well as informing the recipients about Stable Fly and their effects on animals and humans.

During the course of the year a number of our committee members have attended meetings and workshops where they were able to raise the profile of the Stable Fly problem.

Some of these included:

- a public meeting in Moora regarding the Bio-solids issue.
- Several meetings of local Groups that were interested in being informed about the issue.
- a number of meetings and Field Days on Composting
- a workshop at the Perth Zoo on the Governments commitment to a Zero Waste Management Scheme

Liaise with Relevant Ministers:

Our other major goal for the year had been to get to meet with the relevant ministers that could bring about changes with the current system of use of Raw Poultry Manure (RPM).

It quickly became obvious that the person we needed to talk to was the Minister for Agriculture.

Again, through some judicious enquiries from our DC we were invited to a meeting with the Hon Kim Chance on Oct 4th 2005. The details of that meeting were reported to our membership through the SFAG Rag, but suffice to say, our overall impression of that meeting was that Mr Chance was very supportive of our thrust to see a complete ban on the use of RPM, (eventually).

He suggested that reducing the time available to use the RPM from 4 months to 3 months, and then 2 before a final phase out would be a sensible compromise with the Vege Growers.

He said that he would need to liaise with the Vege Growers to give them time to get themselves ready for this move. (We were hoping that the initial phasing out of May could occur in the 2006 season, but as we learnt, things move slowly in politics).

However, we felt that we would refrain from attempting to pressurise the minister on the issue, as at least the matter was moving forward.

While I was away this last month (Sept 2006), taking a well earned break, some members of our committee met with the Minister again to follow-up on a number of the issues that had been raised at the initial meeting, and some that had gained prominence in the time subsequent to that meeting. (Our DC will present a report on that meeting later in the AGM).

Stable Fly Management Steering Group:

I feel that in no small measure, it was pressure on the Stable Fly issue from the SFAG that the SFMSG was re-convened, and I attended the second of their meetings that occurred this year.

At this meeting a number of very important recommendations were moved. Again, all recipients of the SFAG Rag were informed of these, but I think they warrant repeating, and I will paraphrase.

1. That May is removed from the RPM use period from next season (2007)
2. (pt a.) That a total ban on the use of RPM be brought in from Dec 2011
2. (pt b.) That a protocol for the management of RPM, (that was suggested by VWA), be accepted for the interim period.
3. That the Minister for Planning be requested to make a decision, one way or the other, on the future of the Poultry Litter Fired Power Station.

All these issues were subsequently raised with Minister Chance at the recent meeting, and as mentioned previously, our DC will cover them in his report on that meeting.

I would also like to acknowledge the strong leadership role that was taken by the Gingin Shire President, Mr George Gifford, at the SFMSG meeting in making sure that these motions came to fruition.

Alliances:

During the year we have come into contact with a few groups and many individuals that have joined with us in our campaign to eradicate the Stable Fly scourge. . Now, while we have been careful not to involve the SFAG in peripheral issues, where we see there is potential for the spread of Stable Fly then we are prepared to lend our support.

One of these groups who made contact with us is worried about the use of Bio-solids in the Mid-west agricultural area. Their concerns are wider than just the potential Stable Fly problem, but we have lent our qualified support based on our determination that the SF issue does not get ignored.

Another was a group of concerned residents in the Swan Shire that were experiencing a definite SF problem, and weren't getting any support from their local shire. Our DC organised a visit to the area at short notice.

While speaking of Alliances, at this stage I would also like to pay tribute to the support we received with this matter, as well as the overall issue, from both Bob Paulin (DAFWA), and Lew Withers, (Dept of Health). I strongly feel that along with Dave Peckitt from Dept of Health, we can also count these men from these two organisations as strong allies in this campaign.

While many members of parliament have been made aware of the Stable Fly problem by the SFAG, (including Judi Moylan, our local Federal MP), I feel one person that warrants a special mention as an ally with this issue is our local state MP, Gary Snook. Gary has shown strong support for our campaign, and he attended our monthly meeting in May where he spoke about waste being one of the most pressing problems facing both state and local governments. The reason that he couldn't be with us tonight is that he is currently debating the Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Bill in parliament, which should have positive ramifications in the future for the Stable Fly problem. (More on that later)

While probably not what you would call an ally, I would like to mention the positive feedback that we had from VWA's Development Officer, David Ellement, when he attended a meeting with us at the Gingin Shire offices, and subsequently at an on-farm visit that we had to "Caraban" at Woodridge, to see their problem first hand. David was courageous enough to agree that this problem had to be solved, and that the VWA could not hide from it. While David may not have a lot of sway in the final decision making process of the VWA, I am confident that when he does have a chance of giving his opinion, it will be a sensible and balanced one.

And finally on alliances, I could not conclude without mentioning the strong support that we have received from the team at the Gingin Shire. I would applaud them on their initiative to instigate a dedicated helicopter flight to look for potential Stable Fly "Hotspots". We look forward to their continuing support and the maintenance of a strong working relationship with them in the coming years.

Frustrations:

Apart from the obvious frustration of things not moving quickly enough for our liking, I would have to say that one of the issues that has really bugged us has been the refusal of the Minister for Planning to:

- a) make a decision, one way or the other, on the fate of the Poultry Litter Fired Power Station. and,
- b) even to acknowledge our many letters with an indication that a decision would be made at any time in the future.

A further frustration was the failure of the “semi-composted” product Formula 90 to live up to its promised potential, which was to provide a cheap, safe (in terms of Stable Fly breeding) alternative to RPM

Positives:

Overall, I believe that the SFAG has achieved a great deal this year, with the main gain being that we raised the profile of the problem, and have received a good hearing from the people that hopefully can bring about change.

I believe that one of the main reasons that the SFAG has been so successful at achieving this, is that, as well as being very professional in our presentation of the issue, we have also been pragmatic in our approach.

By this I mean, that instead of just being negative in our discussions, we are prepared to accept that the Vegetable Growers will need an alternative to replace the RPM.

I firmly believe that this alternative is to be found in the Composting industry, and as it looks like the Power station is not going to get approval, we should be supporting Government and Industry initiatives in composting.

Conclusion:

I cannot let this report conclude without registering my admiration and thanks for the energy, dedication and professional skill that Jo Ottaway has brought to the position of secretary of the SFAG.

It is fine for us members of the committee to decide, in our wisdom, that “we” should write to this minister or that newspaper, but it is Jo who is the person who has to literally spend hours composing these on our behalf.

We have, on a number of occasions had the feedback that the SFAG is one of the most professional lobby groups going around, and I feel that in no small measure this is due to the skill of our secretary. Well done Jo!

And of course, a huge thankyou to the members of the committee for their dedication to the cause, and hopefully those long, cold meetings in the CWA hall will be worth it in the end.

And a final thankyou for the support that we have received from our members over the year, as without it we wouldn't have been able to maintain our enthusiasm over this very busy and at times challenging year.

Bob Wilson

CHAIRMAN, SFAG

26 September 2006

