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An Oasis in Byron Shire: Factors in the Progress and Success of a Local Greens Party

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An Oasis in Byron Shire:

Factors in the Progress and Success of a Local Greens Party

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Abstract

The Greens in Byron Shire on the North Coast of New South Wales gained four of ten seats on the Shire Council including the mayoral position in 2004, giving them a strong voice in the direction of the Shire. This degree of local success is incredibly rare for the Australian Greens or for any third party, and thus, the example of the Byron Greens is a significant case for anyone involved with local politics in Byron or anyone who is involved with third parties, specifically with the Greens. This study sets out to determine the factors in the success of this group, dating back to their 1991 inception.

After collecting data from a number of sources, a series of six interviews was carried out with individuals experienced with the Byron Greens. The results of these interviews are presented and discussed by the following topics: natural beauty of the area, the demographics and voting rationale for Green supporters, the actions of other parties and groups, unique factors in the election or responsibilities of local government in Byron Shire, differences between the Byron Greens and other groups, the Greens' poor showing in the 1991 elections, the Greens' future in Byron Shire, and other factors that may be at work.

The conclusions from the data find that the natural environment and the Aquarius Festival of 1973 were the most significant events in bringing Greens voters to the region, that the institutional setup of Byron Shire Council elections work in the Greens favor, that issues of development are significant, and that the party has found strong organization and leadership, which has helped create their marked achievements in the Shire.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that any references to Byron Shire in this project recognize that the Shire is on the land of the Bunjulung Nation.

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Abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party

BEACON - Byron Environment and Conservation Organization

BEC – Byron Environment Centre

‘Greens’ vs. ‘greens’ – This distinction is an important one: ‘Greens’ refers to the Australian Greens Party whereas ‘greens’ is not necessarily affiliated with a party, but rather with the environment movement.

NSW – New South Wales

Introduction

Within the environment movement, the possibilities of policy-based solutions and other means of legislative support for issues of environmental sustainability are given a great deal of attention. However, these solutions are often dismissed as infeasible in the face of a political climate hesitant to authentically incorporate ‘green principles’ such as sustainable development in governmental decision-making. However, when elected politicians are sensitive to environmental priorities in their policy positions and voting habits, the scenario can change: government decisions once thought impossible can become the status quo. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding the formation of a Green political presence becomes valuable to those interested in employing political means of environmental protection or, for that matter, to anyone affiliated with the Greens. Such an understanding also carries the broader implication of analyzing the transferability of such a presence in other regions and on other governmental levels. On a broader political and social sense, voting levels for third parties can be seen as an indicator of voter dissatisfaction with major parties (Lohrey 2002, 65) and even, in some cases, can represent a significant shift in the ideology or priorities of an electorate.

Over the past decade, Byron Shire on the north coast of New South Wales has become fertile ground for the young Australian Greens Party, a group that “has arisen out of and continues to evolve from its grass roots—from concerns that developed out of the cultural revolution of the sixties and seventies” (Lohrey 2002, 8). The Greens, still considered a fringe group by some political commentators including Mungo MacCallum (pers. comm. 25/10/05), has, since its conception, “evolved into a real constituency,

something more than just a broad-based protest vote” (Lohrey 2002, 2). Since the 1980s, “when the southern dropouts who had been drifting into the district since the hippy invasions of the late 60’s decided to test their voting strength against the old-timers” (MacCallum 11/9/99), this constituency has had a voice in council. In 1995, Richard Staples became the first Green Party candidate elected to the local governing body (Byron Shire Echo, 13/3/1995). The Greens’ presence has increased gradually ever since. In 2004, the party received 39% of the primary vote (Byron Shire Echo, 29/3/04). Now, with four Green councilors (out of ten) on the Byron Shire Council (Byron-Ballina Greens, online) and a de facto majority, given independent Peter Westheimer’s general voting habits and the power held in the casting vote of the state’s first popularly elected Green mayor, Jan Barham (Davies and Dick, 30/3/2004), the precepts of sustainable development and other green ideals theoretically enter into the day-to-day decision-making process of the Council. This paper seeks to identify the causes at work in the formation of this political reality.

‘Byron’ carries with it a certain connotation in Australia and even internationally. Alternative lifestyles, surfers, and tourists and backpackers are representative of Byron culture for many. In Time and Tide Again: A History of Byron Bay, Robert Smith and Maurice Ryan write that, since the 1973 Aquarius Festival in nearby Nimbin, Byron Bay and its surrounds have been known for their population of people seeking alternative lifestyles (Ryan and Smith 2001, 125). Many of these individuals hold environmental protection as a high priority and are willing to involve themselves in actions for such causes. Smith and Ryan recount that the activist nature of the town traces back to the early part of the 20th Century, long before ‘greenies’ or ‘hippies’ took over the paddocks

of since-abandoned dairy farms (Ryan and Smith 2001, 27). The notoriously unsustainable industries such as timber-getting, whaling, and sand mining that once dominated the region gave way to notable environmental victories, such as the 1995 blocking of Club Med's proposal to build a resort in Byron Bay (MacCallum 11/9/1999). These victories have sprung from the actions of vocal and committed citizens in and around the shire. Many of these citizens are 'blow-ins' or 'sea changers,' people who are not originally from the area but have been drawn to the Shire for a multitude of reasons, most obviously the undeniable natural beauty of the region's coast and hinterlands (Ryan and Smith 2001, 125). The beaches, noted for their surfing, combined with the proximity to rainforests and culture of those who have come to the region has drawn a population of wealthier individuals and visiting backpackers supporting a flourishing tourist industry.

Besides the demographics of the region, institutional and organizational tendencies also have the ability to shape politics on a local level. Aspects within how the Byron Shire Council is elected, including compulsory voting, changes in 'above-the-line' voting regulations, the lack of voting wards within the shire, and the distribution of preferences in council elections all have the potential to aid the Greens come election time (pers. comm. with Heilpern, 10/11/05). The comparative role of local government, keeping in mind the division of governance unique to federations such as Australia could also, theoretically, play into the Greens' achievements in Byron Shire. Further, the strategic operations of the party, the party's individual candidates, and the decisions or policies of other parties and groups can also determine how people vote.

Any question regarding the success of the Greens in Byron Shire must be, in part, a question of why people in this area are attracted to Green candidates. Voting citizens in

a representative democracy have the power to shape their political parties and their government, just as governments shape the laws and life of the community in question. The challenge in understanding this interplay lies in the reasons particular people support particular groups, ideas, or candidates in elections. The question then arises, which of these many possible explanations are truly responsible for the electoral success of the Greens of Byron Shire? Which historical, natural, cultural, and institutional factors are most significant in the formation of this green political oasis? This paper hopes to address these questions and clearly identify the variables upon which such a political community is built.

Methodology

Study Location

After selecting the study question, I determined that Byron Bay would be an appropriate base for the project, given its importance as a center of population and culture within the Shire. Since my focus was on local government issues, most pertinent resources (both primary and secondary) were likely to be found within the Shire. Additionally, Byron Bay is heavily traveled and offers buses to surrounding cities and towns, such as Mullumbimby and Lismore, where other research was conducted.

Data Collection

First, I collected background data from sources found in the libraries of SIT, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, and Southern Cross University in Lismore. I also gathered information from print media and the internet. This background information enabled me to form a collection of possible variables to test. These variables were placed into broad, relatively open-ended questions designed to gauge the perceived importance of each variable with respect to the study question. I then collected data using a series of intensive interviews, held from 15 November to 28 November. Intensive interviews seemed the superior data collection technique for my purposes given the fact that a high degree of understanding and experience of the history, politics, and culture of the region was necessary for an accurate evaluation of variables. An extensive survey, while perhaps more easily quantified and analyzed, would have been inappropriate given the specific nature of the questions. Perhaps a survey given to a large group of local experts would have been the best method of data collection for this project, but unfortunately time constraints prohibited this strategy.

The next challenge was gaining a variety of perspectives from my group of interviewees in order to eliminate bias as much as I could and bring in opinions and ideas that I had not considered in my efforts to identify variables. I wanted to interview at least one individual from each group: a Green councillor, an experienced and active Green member, a member of the media, a non-Green councillor, someone who had experience with other levels of government, and someone who had worked professionally with the community on issues of sustainability. Table 1, shown below, displays the interview participants, their relevant experience in the field, and the date the interview with each person was held. Unfortunately, I was unable to set up a formal interview with anyone from the media, however I was able to talk briefly on the phone with political commentator Mungo MacCallum. Based on the advice of my advisor, I opted to keep most of the interview questions consistent, so as to be able to accurately compare responses. I recorded information from interviews writing down responses or using a digital voice recorder and later copying down responses. Background information gathered earlier was also written down.

Data Analysis

Interview responses were collected by question and analyzed based upon two criteria. Firstly, the degree of importance put upon different variables in their response. This is quantifiably impossible to gauge; however, various degrees of significance can be measured through the description and length of the response for a given question. The other criterion I looked at was how many subjects mentioned a certain variable when the question posed was open.

Table 1: Interview Dates, Subjects, and Experience

Interview Subject	Relevant Experience	Date of Interview
Sandra Heilpern	-Convener, Byron-Ballina Greens -Greens Byron Shire Councillor 2002-2004 -Editor of environmental journal -Executive officer for Nature Conservation Council of NSW	15 November 2005
Richard Staples	-Greens Byron Shire Councillor 1995- -North Coast resident since 1986 -Active in Byron Environment Centre	18 November 2005
Barbara Stander	-Got involved in sustainable development in 1997 -Greens member and volunteer since coming to the area eight years ago	18 November 2005
John Corkill	-Longtime environmental activist -Joined Tweed-Byron Greens in 1992 -Greens NSW Secretary -Greens candidate for state seat of Lismore, federal seat of Page -Greens party worker, campaign coordinator, media coordinator	23 November 2005
Peter Cuming	-Involved in local sand mining and forest campaigns -Managing Director of Sustainable Futures Australia -Independent Maclean Shire Councillor, 1983-1991 -Strategic Planning Consultant to Byron Shire Council, 1987-1989	28 November 2005
Jan Mangleson	-Independent Byron Shire Councillor, 2004- -Resident of Byron Shire for over 30 years	28 November 2005

Results

After gaining a general sense of each interviewee's background and experience in politics of the shire and specifically, in some cases, in Green politics, I began asking questions appropriate to the variables of the study.

1. Natural Environment

The unique natural environment of Byron Shire is an important factor to consider when considering the success of the Greens, a group that has made environmental protection a high priority. The table below summarizes the responses on this topic:

Table 2: How do you perceive the impact of Byron Shire's unique natural environment and corresponding scenery upon the success of the Greens?

Sandra Heilpern	<p>-“It goes both ways... When you live in a community that is so reinforcingly green, you can afford to get a bit complacent.”</p> <p>-“It also resonates with the people that we have something to save.”</p> <p>-“There’s a strong sense of ‘we want to protect our patch and we know we’re the guys who are going to do it.’ That’s why we got nearly a 40% vote in the local elections.”</p>
Richard Staples	<p>-“A lot of the people who come here want to capitalize on that, I think.”</p> <p>-Ecotourism is not well-conceived in the area; some people think it means putting a resort in the middle of a pretty spot.</p>
Barbara Stander	<p>-“The people who originally came set the culture... the people who came to regenerate the bush.”</p>
John Corkill	<p>-“The natural environment being as special as it is and the threats over 20 or so years having galvanized many local residents who said, ‘we’ve got to protect this,’ radicalized them. It mobilized them. They had to get off their butts to say, ‘we want this view’ or ‘we want this recreation’.”</p> <p>-“The connection between the environmental values, the need to protect them and therefore the activism around that is a strong stepping stone then to political activism and alignment with a formal political party. So I think that’s a big connection.”</p>
Peter Cuming	<p>-“It’s obviously the main driver, politically.”</p> <p>-The environment “was an edge issue; now people are more aware”</p> <p>-“There’s a wider acceptance of the Green agenda. So therefore, in a sense, that very beauty and that very platform is now reinforced in the mainstream.”</p>
Peter Cuming (cont.)	<p>-“It’s a heavy influence on their [the Greens’] agenda.</p>
Jan Mangleson	<p>-The hinterland and beaches are beautiful and unique.</p> <p>-The focus on the environment is commendable but I would prefer a more balanced focus.</p> <p>-“I think this branch of the Greens focuses not enough on social justice issues.”</p>

In the responses to this question, it is evident that three of the six interviewed find the aspect of natural beauty important to a high degree. However, three subjects think that there are ways that this feature may not necessarily advance the Green Party or green objectives.

2. *The Greens Constituency in Byron Shire and their Voting Rationale*

Clearly, understanding who votes for Greens and why they vote that way are important considerations in deriving general statements regarding the party’s electoral achievements. This two-part question first examines subjects’ characterization of the party’s voter base, while the second seeks to identify the reasoning behind these voting habits. Table 3 displays the first question:

Table 3: How would you characterize the Greens’ constituency in Byron Shire?

Sandra Heilpern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“People are very politically aware, people are very precious about their environment and about not only conserving the natural environment, but also social conservation.” -“It’s evolved, it’s created itself.” -The area once “attracted young people, now attracts baby boomers coming to the end of their careers.” -Baby boomers came because of “the climate, the freedom, and living out their fantasies. It really is a place of dreams.” -Drug culture significant. -1973 Aquarius Festival in Nimbin. -A lot of professionals dropped everything to live in communities. -Many moved to the coast.
Richard Staples Richard Staples (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It’s “very strong—it’s not random.” -“The people who came to this area, a lot of them consciously come here because they see it as being progressive, as being diverse, tolerant, vibrant... a lot of it’s real but a lot of it’s image. Unfortunately, I must say, a lot of the people who vote for the Greens probably are the same people who take us to court over the developments.” -A “revolt against the old guard” in the 60s and 70s. -Nimbin hippies -“It was creative, it was vibrant, exciting and new. It was a chance to make a mark in a new area where you weren’t tied to the old.”
Barbara Stander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“It’s changed.” -First, it was the people who came after Aquarius, and people who live in the forest. -Now it’s “wealthy people who are working like hell to save the environment.” -Many “people who are moving up here to retire or to buy a business, people who can afford to move here... a high ex-city population.” -“Our constituency is still out there in the hills.”

	-“The myth has kept the myth going. The myth is never the total picture but it’s never a total lie.”
John Corkill	<p>“A lot of the North Coast settlement in, say, the post-70s has been part of that Aquarius Festival, Nimbin” period.</p> <p>-“But there are a lot of people in the North Coast area who have left the big city and said, ‘I want a counter culture’ lifestyle.”</p> <p>-“There are a lot of well-educated people who have a very highly developed criticism of the dominant paradigm, the current social and economic framework and have said ‘that’s not for me’.”</p> <p>-“So, they have selected themselves to come into this area. They live here, so the Greens were, in a sense, an idea whose time came quickly on the North Coast because already there were a great number of people who had, if not rejected wholly, but rejected in part consumerism and ‘the rat race’.”</p>
Peter Cuming	<p>-“It’s changing. Whereas before, you just got the edge effect—activists, sea changers, people who’ve come here who want to keep things the way they are, whereas now, because of the impacts of development, the Greens would have a far broader support in the community.”</p> <p>-The constituency has grown considerably as an alternative vote.</p>
Jan Mangleson	<p>-About an even 50-50 split between Greens and non-Greens</p> <p>-“It has been kind of an immigration of people who see the Shire as a place where they can come and be green and live here.”</p> <p>-“Back in the 70s we had the Aquarius Age,” people from Sydney and Melbourne who came to set up communities and grow drugs.</p> <p>-Multiple occupancies built.</p> <p>-In the 80s, there was “a reinforcement of the earlier movement.”</p> <p>-In the early 90s, the Sannyassins, a religious sect, came as the “new hippies.”</p>
Jan Mangleson (cont.)	-Artists also Green voters.

All responses to this question describe a change in the constituency over the years. Five allude to the importance of the 1973 Aquarius Festival in nearby Nimbin in bringing future Green voters to the area. Three also imply that more recent Greens voters are, in general, wealthier, older, and come from cities.

Table 4, below, shows respondents’ opinions about why voters in Byron Shire choose Greens for local offices. Notice that four mention ideology as being significant,

three credit Labor policies, and issues of development, getting away from the mainstream, and individual candidates are each cited by two respondents.

Table 4: Why do people vote for the Greens in Byron Shire?

Sandra Heilpern	<p>-“There is the threat of development and we very much keep that alive, we capitalize on that...The threat of development is real, and in this way we have a lot of support.”</p> <p>-“People come to Byron because they like it as it is, some like it as it was. We can’t have it as it was but we [the Greens] can work very hard to keep it as near as it is as we can and that pleases a lot of people.”</p> <p>-“The ALP is very pathetic on fronting up to developers.”</p>
Richard Staples	<p>-Council well represents the spectrum of views.</p> <p>-Personal interest—there are some who “wouldn’t give a scrap about the environment.”</p> <p>-“I’m sure the great majority do it because of their sheer philosophy.”</p>
Barbara Stander	<p>-“They trust us. Most people know a Green or two.”</p> <p>-They haven’t done tricks like the other parties.</p> <p>-“Jan [Barham] is very special”</p>
John Corkill	<p>-“I think there are a lot of people who are angry at some of the rhetoric we heard from the Labor Party in the late 80s, early 90s in the environment movement.”</p> <p>-“For a lot of people, that idea that they could only choose one of the two major politics—I think that’s a big part of it.”</p> <p>-“I think the mix of the policies and the politics and the feel of the Greens with the people in the region... I think it’s a good fit.”</p> <p>-Richard Staples’ participation and profile in a wide social network of groups and associations showing that he was committed to green issues.</p>
Peter Cuming	<p>-On the federal level, the move right has caused “a shift of people moving across looking for independents and others who might fulfill their ideological position.”</p> <p>-At the state level, there is “concern with the right wing politics of Labor”</p> <p>-Locally, “this is where it affects lifestyle. People who have been fortunate enough to buy in or fortunate enough to live here and love it are concerned about development pressures”</p> <p>-“You’ve got an incredibly large proportion of people who have that sort of ideology”</p>
Jan Mangleson	<p>-People are “getting away from the rat race” by voting Green.</p> <p>-“Use of marijuana is a very big part of it.”</p> <p>-A group with the same ideology came together to the same place</p>

3. The Actions of Other Parties and Groups

The ability of a party to successfully get its candidates elected does not depend on its decisions alone, it is not politically isolated. Other parties, individuals, and organizations are capable of affecting the performance of a specific party. Table 5, shown below, takes a look at the subjects' response to this very query. (Note: some responses from the previous question fit into this category as well and are included, where appropriate).

Table 5: Are there other ways in which the actions of other groups or parties have led to the Greens' success in Byron Shire?

Sandra Heilpern	-“People were shocked to have a pro-development council which slowly resulted in the growth of the Greens.”
Sandra Heilpern (cont.)	-“Also, the outrageous behavior of a general manager... and a mayor who colluded with them.” -“The decision too to build the atrocious council chambers in Mullumbimby was a huge one.” -“The ALP is very pathetic on fronting up to developers.”
Richard Staples	-“The state Labor Party and the Federal Liberal Party have done some things that are just so unethical to the locals in the last three years.” -“The state Labor Party is pushing the trade in this area.” -“Because we're not tied to business in the way that the big parties are, we're free to think about things like land transport.”
Barbara Stander	-Labor going with the war -“If anything gets us votes, it's situations where people are ethically challenged.” -Other issues: Tampa, nuclear power, global warming -Little difference between ALP and coalition at state level
John Corkill	“I think there are a lot of people who are angry at some of the rhetoric we heard from the Labor Party in the late 80s, early 90s in the environment.”
Peter Cuming	“-On the federal level, the move right has caused “a shift of people moving across looking for independents and others who might fulfill their ideological position.”

	-At the state level, there is “concern with the right wing politics of Labor.”
Jan Mangleson	-“They [the Greens] got their 40% vote as a protest vote against the previous mayor.”

Two individuals interviewed, Councillor Mangleson and Sandra Heilpern, mentioned dissatisfaction with the previous mayor, Tom Wilson, as a significant reason for the swing in favor of the Greens. Five subjects gave the policies of the NSW Labor Party significance in determining Greens success.

4. *Unique Aspects of Local Government as an Institution in Byron Shire*

A look at both the electoral system that Byron Shire uses to elect its Council and the responsibilities that are unique to local government could help reveal a comparative electoral advantage for Greens. Interviewees’ responses to the importance of electoral nuances are shown in Table 6 below, while their thoughts on the role of local government with respect to the Green Party’s agenda can be found in Table 7.

Table 6: Are there any unique qualities in the election of local government as an institution that benefit the Greens?

Sandra Heilpern	-“A lot of local councils have wards... It would be much harder to get Green councilors in on that basis. There’d be whole chunks of the Shire that we wouldn’t have a hope of getting in.” -A popularly elected mayor
Richard Staples	-“The electoral system, being a collegiate system at elections is very important. It’s a proportional representation system.” -Preferential voting -“A good candidate only needs 12% to get elected and again, you can get preferences to get that vote.” -“Back in ’95, I wouldn’t have gotten in if it was a different system.”
Barbara Stander	-“We’re lucky that we don’t have wards... It works for us” -Popularly elected mayor -Preferential voting -Ballina has wards but no Greens
	-“The councils that have a whole shire electorate means that there is

John Corkill	<p>a capacity for people of like mind throughout the shire to accumulate their votes into a solid support.”</p> <p>-“There are a lot of Greens in Kyogle Shire but there are three wards. There’s never going to be a greenie elected in any ward because conservatives, cattle farmers, et cetera, have a majority in each of those wards.”</p> <p>-“I think there’s a strong connection there. Genuinely representative democracy has the widest possible electoral approach and I think that’s worked to Byron Shire’s good effect.”</p>
Peter Cuming	<p>-Using preferences wisely “is a really important thing.”</p> <p>-Run other people in a group and then grab their votes... “The Greens here have been able to do that very effectively.”</p> <p>-“By not running it as wards means that you don’t have these separate communities focusing on individual candidates and therefore you tend to get a much broader vote across the shire.”</p> <p>-“So, if they had wards it would be very difficult in some wards to get a Green candidate up because it would be a very conservative area.”</p> <p>-“When you have that and you add it to the proportional representation voting... then you’re likely to get a lot of transfer of votes to the Greens down the list...”</p>
Jan Mangleson	<p>-“We don’t have wards in the Shire, the voting is global” and that has advantaged the Greens.</p> <p>-“They [the Greens] mounted a very strong campaign” against wards when it came up to referendum.</p> <p>-“The state government changed the way elections were held and it gave the Greens four seats on a silver plate”</p>

All interviewees believe the lack of wards has significantly helped the Greens achieve their de facto majority in the Byron Shire Council. Three mentioned the Greens’ use of preferences, two the fact that Byron has a popularly elected mayor, and Councillor Mangleson brought up the recent change in election laws regarding voting for groups or parties. Group or ‘above the line’ voting was changed so that groups on the ballot needed five people in the group instead of just two, perhaps benefiting groups with larger, organized parties (Byron Shire Echo 1/3/04).

Table 7: Are there any unique qualities in the responsibilities of local government as an institution that benefit the Greens?

Sandra Heilpern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There is “not that much money after services to spend on environmental projects.” -They can vote against inappropriate development but developers often prepared to go to court.
Richard Staples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sewerage moratorium has “given us a huge ability to put a break on development over the last eight years, which, without that, Byron Bay would probably look like the Gold Coast by now.” -Now trying to get a new LEP (Local Environment Plan) to control growth with community and environmental considerations in mind.
Barbara Stander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There is daily contact and accessibility. -Participation and democracy -Many people are hard to reach—“you mainly reach the politically aware.” -“Local government is a creature of state government.”
John Corkill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“Certainly rubbish and recycling and the notion that we’ve got to be more responsible for our consumerism. I mean, that’s core business for environmentalists and that’s where Richard [Staples] was very successful.” -“To some extent the substance of local government is a strong correlation” for action on environmental issues.
John Corkill (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“Local council is the public consent authority for most [development] matters... In many cases those matters are taken out of the hands of local politicians.”
Peter Cuming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“Local government has had to be quite resilient to external politics to both the states and federal government;” no constitutional rights. -Local government provides a shire “a chance to do things your own way and not get too caught up” in party politics. -“So that fits into the participatory democracy model which the Greens promote themselves. So, in a sense, you’d think that local government would be a perfect breeding ground, perfect fostering ground for Green politics because it’s the place which is closest to the people.”
Jan Mangleson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There has been a lack of infrastructure in the Shire since 1996. -They have used the sewerage moratorium for block to development. -The Greens are perceived to be ‘anti-development’—some like this fact, some do not.

In response to this question, four individuals give local government’s role in development as an issue that plays into the hands of Greens candidates, with the two current councillors specifically mentioning the use of a sewerage moratorium as a way to curb other development. Four also warn that local governments have limited authority

given other governing bodies including state and federal governments and the courts.

Two cite the Greens’ belief in participatory democracy as a reason for their success in local affairs. John Corkill adds that local government’s role in the management of rubbish is in harmony with Green concerns over human consumption.

5. Differences Between the Byron Greens and Other Party Groups

Continuing a look through the various possible variables at work in the accomplishments of the Greens, one should pay attention to the decisions and operations of the party as an organization. I decided to find out if there are any significant differences between BBG operations and those of other parties, Green or not. Table 8 shows the results of this question.

Table 8: Have you noticed any significant differences between the operations of the Byron Greens compared to other party groups?

Sandra Heilpern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“We’re pretty vibrant—we’ve got a lot of members and about a quarter of our members come to meetings.” -“To get a quarter of those on the books to a monthly meeting is a commitment that is very strong.” -Only a handful at the local ALP meetings. -“We’re a bit spearheading in terms of parity between the city and the country.” -No problem getting 150 volunteers to hand out ‘how to vote’ cards at voting locations during elections.
Richard Staples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The party has put up “candidates that are willing to put in a hard go.” -They have a strong commitment, they listen, and they don’t necessarily work as a bloc.
Barbara Stander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“You have the same problems that every other political party has.” -“It’s that closeness, that grassroots drive in the party” that leads to the Greens’ success. -The ALP seems much more backstabbing. -“Jan [Barham] is a very astute politician. She’s got a terrific breadth of understanding.” -“Those with bigger cities have to be more concerned with urban issues.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Grassroots democracy is a key Green pillar

John Corkill	-People see too much power going to Sydney -“Local Greens can really reinforce this notion of wanting grassroots democracy whereas the other party groups have wanted to try and see the party develop a structure almost parallel to the Labor Party” in having state committees that make decisions for them.
Peter Cuming	-They’ve brought up broader environmental issues and used them as a “springboard for them to identify local examples of that and then use that to their advantage compared to other parties, which haven’t really had the same.” -“I think they’ve had the benefit of people at the state level... they’ve used their experience well at other levels to effectively poll well and deal well here.” -“They’ve developed a unique position in Australia—a Green mayor who is a woman—a first in Australia.” -“The have tended to stick together, and that’s important as a party. It has brought a different flavor to politics, definitely. There is now, in Byron, a real definite party politics.”
Jan Mangleson	-Up until last elections, the Greens were the only group that ran on a party platform. -Jan [Barham’s] popularity helped the other three councillors.

Three mention Mayor Jan Barham’s leadership abilities and popularity as being a significant factor setting the Byron Greens apart from other groups. The fact that the Byron Greens also have a high degree of presence as a party, organization, and membership was mentioned by three others including Jan Mangleson, who notes that the Greens were the only group that ran on a party ticket in council elections up until the last election (pers. comm. with Jan Mangleson, 28/11/05). Two bring up the population density of Byron as a unique consideration—not completely city nor rural—as significant.

6. Greens' poor showing in 1991

In the 1991 Council elections only two green candidates (not affiliated with the party) were elected to the council. Although the formation of the local party occurred the same year, it is worthwhile to determine what was different in this election since green and Green candidates both before and after had been seen a larger

contingency in council. Perhaps their failure in 1991 reveals some clues to the success to come. Table 9 displays the interview subjects' thoughts on this issue. (There is no data for Barbara Stander or Peter Cuming because neither was in the area in 1991).

Table 9: What was different in the 1991 elections, when green candidates did not poll very well?

Sandra Heilpern	- "We weren't vigilant and we thought it couldn't happen." - It was "a bit of a shock."
Richard Staples	- "A lot of the older people were starting to phase out and a bunch of rednecks were running for the council. It was clear that there was a very well-organized group running."
John Corkill	- There was a backlash to the greens' success in forest campaigns - "[green Councillor] Anudhi [Wentworth] had been very vocal" - "They [the conservative group] organized, they got a strong representation."
Jan Mangleson Jan Mangleson (cont.)	- "The community had ten years of greens very drastically changing the way the Shire did business." - People felt that the early greens on council in the early 80s were dishonest and there was a backlash.

John Corkill and Jan Mangleson both mention a backlash to greens' previous successes. Richard Staples and John Corkill both point out the organization of the conservative group running in the 1991 election for council, while Sandra Heilpern alludes to complacency on the part of the greens (not the Greens). It is important to keep in mind that 1991 was also the year that the Tweed-Byron Greens (precursor of the Byron-Ballina Greens) formed.

7. *The Greens' Future in Byron Shire*

The success that the Greens have had in Byron Shire will grow ever more significant with the group's ability to sustain this voice in Council. Therefore, it is interesting to find out how those interviewed view the future of the Greens in the Shire. Table 10, shown below, summarizes the responses to this issue.

Table 10: How do you see the future of the Greens in Byron Shire?

Sandra Heilpern	- "There's a very strong, powerful vigilance and pride in this community, so it will always be that interface between Greens and the common good." - Likely to get more of a majority as population changes.
Richard Staples	- "We have to get keep putting up good candidates." - We need to have seven candidates in the next elections, we should maintain the majority.
Barbara Stander	"I see nothing to show that we would plummet in votes."
John Corkill	- "My suspicion is that, with the Greens having been in the ascendancy in Byron Shire, there may be a very overt campaign in the next council election, an attempt to crawl back control." - "We may see a situation with the Right organizing strongly, there's a backlash, and people who are marginal changing their vote... it's a possibility."
Peter Cuming Peter Cuming (cont.)	- "If you look at past as a litmus of the future, I think it would be a bit worrying because I think some people feel that they [the Greens] haven't delivered, as a group, a very effective, clear vision of the future." - "One would expect that you should still have a fairly strong Green representation in the next election" - "They've got to do some hard work in the next three years, but I think the future's bright."
Jan Mangleson	- "I think we're getting back to the backlash already." - "A number of issues have come up where the Greens have let down the people who voted for them."

To be fair to the interview respondents' ability to prognosticate the future success of the Greens, there are still three years before the next council election and thus, many minds yet to be made up about issues and candidates. Indeed, it is difficult at this stage to predict what coming elections hold for the Byron Shire Greens. That being said, two of those interviewed warned of a possible backlash against the Greens at the next election. Two also believe that they have, to some extent, let down their own voters. Three are more hopeful about the Greens' chances in 2008. However, no respondent seemed too sure of anything at this point.

8. Other thoughts

Nearing the end of each interview, the subject was given the opportunity to offer other ideas with respect to the study question that had not been raised earlier in the interview. Table 11 is a collection of responses that do not fit in the other categories.

Table 11: Are there any other notable factors you see as having importance in this issue?

Sandra Heilpern	-“Sustainable job growth needs to be tackled by the Greens.”
Richard Staples	-“The quality of the people being elected is very high.”
Barbara Stander	-“Consistency—we haven’t changed our message in 20 years.” -The principles, commitment, and convictions of Green politicians
John Corkill	-“[State MP] Ian [Cohen]’s election was huge.” -“Ian’s election, when he could come out as a state MP living in Byron Shire, speaking on state issues and carrying the Greens’ name, I think that was a very strong focus in the Shire. No other shire had that.”
John Corkill (cont.)	-I was part of it too: I helped to create more access to parliament for people and I was one of the early advocates getting involved in development, rather than just playing a blocking role. -“We’re a marginal electorate. The federal seat has been won and lost, it’s fiercely contested.” -The sea changers have “created a volatile electorate that is marginal.”
Peter Cuming	-“They have a philosophical commitment” to protect the environment. -The people on council represent different aspects of the Green agenda. -They are open-minded.
Jan Mangleson	-“We’re a very resilient community.” -“The General Manager has a reasonably good team together.”

From these responses, considerably different opinions evidently exist for the perceived and real achievements of the Greens at the Shire level. The next section will begin to break down these opinions and prioritize them with respect to how important they are and how they fit together to try to explain the question put forward in the introductory section.

Discussion

1. Analysis of the Importance of Natural Environment

Three of the individuals interviewed seemed to think the natural environment is an important aspect in the Greens' success. Sandra Heilpern recognizes "a strong sense of 'we want to protect our patch and we know we're the guys who are going to do it. That's why we got nearly a 40% vote in the local elections'" (pers. comm. 15/11/05). Additionally, John Corkill characterizes the issue as "a big connection" (pers. comm. 23/11/05) and Peter Cuming refers to it as "the main driver, politically" (pers. comm. 28/11/05). It seems as though this issue gains importance when it is viewed in comparison to the heavy development pressures felt in the Shire. Robert Smith and Maurice Ryan argue, "It is the scenery which is at the forefront of the debate on Byron's future. The environmentalist wants to preserve nature's setting--the developer wants to press for ever higher buildings" (Ryan and Smith 2001, 127).

Some of those interviewed recognize that the natural environment of the area can bring negative aspects such as complacency (pers. comm. with Heilpern 15/11/05), too much of a focus on environmental issues such that considerations of social justice are not recognized (pers comm. with Mangleson 28/11/05), and an intent to take advantage of the natural beauty (pers. comm. with Staples 18/11/05).

All in all, it seems as though the unique natural beauty of Byron Shire does play some role in the Greens success, specifically given the dichotomy between development and environmental protection. The natural surrounds are also perhaps significant in having brought Green voters there in the first place. Barbara Stander recognizes “the people who came to regenerate the bush” (pers. comm. 18/11/05) as having an important role in setting the culture of the area. Ryan and Smith agree, writing that alternative-lifestyle people were attracted by “the physical beauty of the Bay’s surrounds” (Ryan and Smith 2001, 125). The question of the formation of this constituency is an important one in determining the ability of the Greens to attract votes.

2. Analysis of the Importance of the Greens Constituency in Byron Shire and their Voting Rationale

The Greens acquired such a large voting base in Byron Shire through at least two distinct settlements of people. The first, as five of six interviewees mention, stemmed from people coming to the area from Nimbin’s notable Aquarius Festival in 1973. While this is true for other shires in the area, the trend was stronger in Byron due to its unique physical beauty, as suggested above. These individuals also came to live in multiple occupancies in the hinterlands, to which Barbara Stander and Jan Mangleson both allude (pers. comm. 18/11/05, pers. comm. 28/11/05). The importance of this historical period to Greens in this specific area is reflected in Amanda Lohrey’s analysis of the Greens on

a national level: “This is the political potency of the Australian Greens Party, that it has arisen out of and continues to evolve from its grass roots—from concerns that developed out of the cultural revolution of the sixties and seventies” (Lohrey 2002, 8).

To the second wave of people, now called ‘sea changers,’ the interview subjects generally gave descriptions of wealthier, well-educated, and older individuals who left big cities for various reasons. Richard Staples notes that some of these Green voters are “probably some of the same people who take us [the Council] to court over developments” (pers. comm. 18/11/05). Ryan and Smith seem to agree with the interviewees basic suggestions about the “new breeds of citizens,” writing that many of them were “well-educated, intelligent, and courageous” (Ryan and Smith 2001, 125). Mungo MacCallum categorizes this constituency as “southern dropouts who had been drifting into the district since the hippy invasions of the late 60’s” (MacCallum 11/9/1999). A high profile Sydney Morning Herald article observed that “The trend [towards the Greens] may reflect an influx of baby boomers heading to the coast for lifestyle reasons...” (Davies and Dick 30/3/2004). Obviously, the Greens owe a significant proportion of their success to those first people who came to the area and gave it a cultural reputation, inviting further settlement by individuals ideologically compatible with the political Greens.

So why do people vote for Greens in Byron Shire? The interview results, by way of four of six interviews, suggest that ideological alignment is the greatest reason for this vote. Lohrey supports this by arguing that the Green Party “has evolved into a real constituency, something more than just a broad-based protest vote” (Lohrey 2002, 2). While three subjects mention state Labor Party policies, this is not a comparative

advantage for the Byron Greens specifically since all local Greens parties in NSW would have this as an advantage, yet the Byron Greens are much more successful in elections than most NSW local Greens groups. However, the unique pressures of development in the Shire and the strength of individual Greens candidates (each mentioned by two subjects) are both legitimate motivations for voting Green in Byron. Sandra Heilpern suggests that the Greens are aware of voters' sensitivities over development, saying "There is the threat of development and we very much keep that alive, we capitalize on that...The threat of development is real, and in this way we have a lot of support" (pers. comm. 15/11/05). The fears associated with development can be seen in Figure 1. So, it seems as though the issues involved with development and the perceived quality of Green candidates do account for some of the impetus for people in Byron Shire to vote Green, but that a large majority of Green voters are simply voting for the party with whom they are most ideologically aligned.

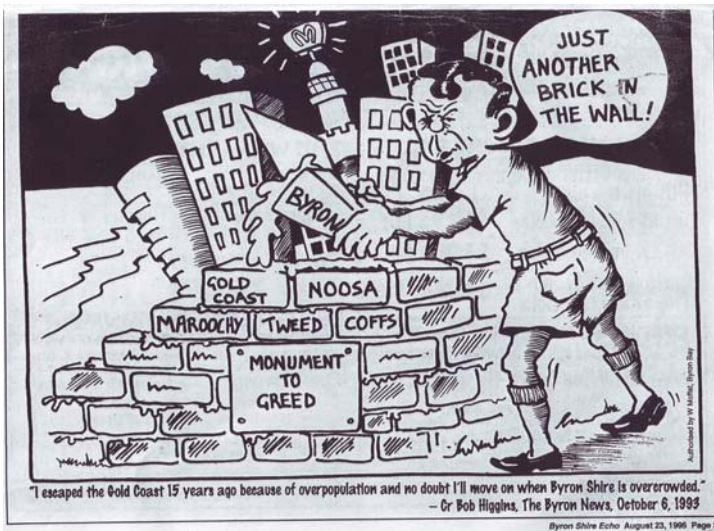


Figure 1: The threat of mass development looms large in Byron Shire (Byron Shire Echo 23/8/1995).

3. Analyzing the Importance of the Actions of Other Parties and Groups

The policies of the ALP are mentioned by five of the interview subjects but again, these facts must be, in large part, discounted as a singular factor in the success of the

Byron Greens. While, on a national level, “There are indications through rising third-party voting that rural and outer urban voters are rejecting the two major parties” (Putnam 2002, 357), this has not, on a larger scale, translated into kind of support the Greens in Byron Shire have received, gaining nearly 40% support in the primary of the last council election.

The other significant response that showed up was dissatisfaction with the previous Mayor and General Manager, who were involved in “outrageous behavior” with public money, according to Sandra Heilpern (pers. comm. 15/11/05). Tom Wilson, the mayor at the time, had become extremely unpopular and had endorsed Councillor Ross Tucker for mayor as an act of spite towards the Greens, who were running Jan Barham for mayor (Byron Shire Echo 8/3/04). Jan Mangleson states that “They [the Greens] got their 40% vote as a protest vote against the previous mayor” (pers. comm. 28/11/05). This did seem to be a somewhat significant issue in the past election, specifically involving the mayoral election, since the Greens’ Jan Barham won in an extremely close race (Byron Shire Echo 29/3/04).

4. Analyzing the importance of Unique Aspects of Local Government as an Institution in Byron Shire

All six respondents felt strongly that the lack of voting wards in the Shire contributed extensively to the Greens’ ability to get four councilors elected. In March 1995, the NSW Minister for Local Government refused a Byron Shire Council (then with a very small green presence) request to institute four wards in the Shire, even though a strong majority of the public was against this move, which seemed politically motivated, given the degree to which this very institutional nuance has proven to support the Greens (Byron Shire Echo 8/3/1995) (see Figure 2). John Corkill believes “there’s a strong

connection there. Genuinely representative democracy has the widest possible electoral approach and I think that's worked to Byron Shire's good effect." Corkill also recognizes that, "There are a lot of Greens in Kyogle Shire but there are three wards. There's never going to be a greenie elected in any ward because conservatives, cattle farmers, et cetera, have a majority in each of those wards" (pers. comm. 23/11/05). Councillor Staples recalls this fact's importance in his own political career, saying, "Back in '95, I wouldn't have gotten in if it was a different system." He also notes that "A good candidate only needs 12% to get elected and again, you can get preferences to get that vote" (pers. comm. 18/11/05). All perspectives covered in my interviews have cited this electoral institution or rather, the lack thereof, as important in the Greens' successes.



Figure 2: Councillor Ross Tucker and other councillors attempting to institute wards in the Shire, while the majority of the public is against the idea (Byron Shire Echo 8/3/1995, 13).

Other institutional factors came up in responses including the Greens' use of preference voting (three mentioned this fact), especially when combined with a change in group voting rules (as raised by Councillor Mangleson) and the presence of a popularly

elected mayor (two mentioned this). Although the preference issue is at work in other shires, it may be significant that the Greens have a highly organized local party which has learned how to get the most out of its preferences (pers. comm. with Peter Cuming 28/11/05). The example of a Green popularly elected mayor seems to be a function of the voter base (the mayor needs 50% of the vote) that does not necessarily favor the Greens in Byron any more than any other group or party.

The role of local government must also be looked at in the context of the policies and priorities of the Greens. Again, in the search for situations unique to Byron Shire, local government's responsibilities involving the pace and manner of development combines with the heavy development pressure in the Shire to create an important issue for the local Green platform. In 1995, during the same election in which voters turned down a referendum to introduce wards to the Shire, the Byron Shire Echo remarked that "The new council will give a new direction to Byron Shire as it will have a distinctly greener tinge from the last one. Seven of ten probable councillors are on record as having specific reservations about the speed of development in the Shire, which is likely to slow markedly as a result of the election" (Byron Shire Echo 13/9/95). The issue of development is one of utmost importance to the area and to the Greens, as a party, who have long spoken in terms of a 'sustainable development' paradigm. The priority was reflected in both Byron Shire Council meetings I attended in November, with debates over proposed developments lasting for hours (Byron Shire Council meetings 8/11/05 and 22/11/05). Ironically, the high degree of development pressure is a response to the sizeable industry catering to tourists who are drawn to the area for (in part) the very culture that has been fighting against the development in the first place. Sandra Heilpern

sees this issue playing well with voters, “People come to Byron because they like it as it is, some of them like it as it was. We can’t have it as it was but we can work very hard to keep it as near as it is as we can and that pleases a lot of people because that’s why they came here” (pers. comm. 15/11/05). The question of development, again, connects back with the idea that the area has rare natural beauty, in other words, something worth saving.

Participatory democracy is another key idea amongst Greens. Thus, two of the interview subjects, Barbara Stander and Peter Cuming, have said that this has come into play with the Byron Greens. Cuming remarks that local government “fits into the participatory democracy model which the Greens promote themselves. So, in a sense, you’d think that local government would be a perfect breeding ground, perfect fostering ground for Green politics because it’s the place which is closest to the people” (pers. comm. 28/11/05). Again, this is true of local Greens at large, however, and shows no unique predilection for the Greens in Byron Shire.

5. Analyzing the Importance of Differences Between the Byron Greens and Other Party Groups

In making broad statements about the national party, Amanda Lohrey writes that, in politics, “It takes a long time to produce a disciplined and effective party organization, as the fate of One Nation [another third party] demonstrates. The Greens on the other hand are long-term and experienced campaigners. From the grass roots up they have evolved not only an effective leadership but an army of volunteer labour” (Lohrey 2002, 55). These sentiments appear to be conserved in the case of the Byron locals. The most responses from this question, three each, dealt with Jan Barham’s leadership and the size and organization of the party. Barbara Stander comments, “Jan is a very astute politician.

She's got a terrific breadth of understanding" (pers. comm. 18/11/05). Certainly, the unique situation of having high-profile, highly respected leaders can help a party when elections come around.

Of the abilities of local Green parties, John Corkill asserts, "Local Greens can really reinforce this notion of wanting grassroots democracy whereas the other party groups have wanted to try and see the party develop a structure almost parallel to the Labor Party" (pers. comm. 23/11/05) in having state committees that make decisions for them. A study looking at the civic engagement of Australians found rare increases in participation for events characterized as 'public statements' (Putnam 2002, 354). It should not be surprising, then, that Greens' supporters, many of whom have been involved in such events within the environment movement, should also be more active in a political setting. Perhaps this, in part, is the reason why the Byron Greens are, according to Sandra Heilpern, "pretty vibrant—we've got a lot of members and about a quarter of our members come to meetings" (pers. comm. 15/11/05). This is confirmed by the meeting I attended, where 18 out of 82 members were present (Byron-Ballina Greens meeting 10/11/05). The size of Green supporters was also made clear on November 20, when about 200 people attended a showing of the documentary "Anthem," which was advertised as a fundraiser for the BBG.

As important as these factors may be, some cannot be credited with the Greens' success in Byron specifically because, again, even if some of these statements give the Greens an advantage over other parties in the Shire, the same could be said of any local Greens party, but without the same results. Any difference based on party membership and commitment, for instance, could simply be correlated to the number of Greens voters

in the Shire. However, party organization could be legitimately traced to a presence of coherent leadership within the party (combined with the large number of constituents). The significant effects of this organization, as Jan Mangleson notes, can be seen in the fact that the Greens are the only local chapter of a national party to have put up a group of candidates for Byron Shire Council prior to 2004, when Labor joined the local politics scene in Byron (Local Government Association of NSW and the Shires Association of NSW, online).

6. Analyzing the Importance of the Greens' poor showing in 1991

A more accurate consideration would be that analyzing the greens' (not 'the Greens') poor showing, since the local party was only formed that year (pers. comm. with Heilpern 15/11/05). However, the question may still hold significance for the later success of the party. Two mentioned a backlash against the greens' success on issues inside and out of council in the 80s. Mungo MacCallum writes that the conservatives achieved revenge in 1991 "when, under the formidable leadership of Colonel Ross Tucker... they put to rout the greenies, who had become complacent and divided" (MacCallum 11/9/1999). Sandra Heilpern agrees with the idea of complacency within the greens, whereas Richard Staples and John Corkill recognize the conservatives' organization during that election. Perhaps these responses are better thought of as warnings to the current Byron Greens about what can happen to a fragile majority in the course of one election, rather than any kind of statement attempting to explain their success. That being said, this defeat was likely a strong motivating force behind the 'distinctly greener tinged' Council that was elected in 1995, including Richard Staples, the first Greens member elected to the local governing body.

7. Analyzing the Importance of Perceptions of the Greens' Future in Byron Shire

It's difficult to draw any sort of conclusions from this question but rather, it is an evaluation of how long the success will last for the Greens or perhaps, how it will accumulate. The respondents seem somewhat split and are certainly unsure on this front. However, it sounds as though the Greens' ability to put together a cohesive plan for the Shire and one that is favorable to those who voted for them in the first place will help determine whether or not they can retain their marginal majority in 2008.

8. Analyzing the Importance of Other Issues

Of the important variables mentioned by the interview subjects, the commitment, diversity, convictions, and overall quality of the Greens' candidates was mentioned by three individuals. While this is something that also came up in earlier sections, it is significant that interviewees revisited the idea, revealing perhaps how important the leadership of the party truly is in the success they have experienced. John Corkill extends the importance of this leadership to other politically-involved environmental activists and state Greens politicians, particularly himself and Ian Cohen, respectively. "Ian's election, when he could come out as a state MP living in Byron Shire, speaking on state issues and carrying the Greens' name, I think that was a very strong focus in the Shire. No other shire had that" (pers. comm. 23/11/05). The leadership, publicity, and access that individuals such as these can bring to a party or community are invaluable, according to Corkill. Judging by the other interviewees' opinions of local leaders, this seems quite reasonable. Experienced, dynamic leaders are something that Greens in Byron Shire can claim as one of the keys to their success.

Conclusions

The causes of the Greens candidates' success in Byron Shire are, like the region they represent, inescapably diverse and complex. The evidence shows no single variable capable of explaining the rare high level of support for the Greens. I suggest that, after carefully considering the interview results with respect to previous work regarding the topics in question, the Greens success in Byron has its roots in the formation of a 'green culture.'

This green culture was initially formed by from the pilgrims who came to the 1973 Aquarius Festival in Nimbin and soon thereafter dispersed into Byron Shire in large numbers due to the natural beauty and unique environment of the area. This primary settlement gave the area a powerful reputation as a place for alternative lifestyles, attracting more like-minded people from major cities, people who were fed up with the mainstream lifestyle and with mainstream politics. Once this green culture was in place

and an ecological voting constituency was a latent reality of the Shire, the opportunistic Green Party found sympathetic institutions and respected, experienced leaders to guarantee their success.

They have chiefly capitalized on the institutional framework upon which local government here is elected. In 2004, the Greens combined their ability to use preferences with their comparatively well-organized and large party membership after the institutional change that necessitated five candidates run in a group on the ballot for council elections. The lack of wards and the system of proportional representation alone have resoundingly boosted the Greens ability to get multiple candidates elected to Council. As one voting constituency, Greens concentrated into several parts of the Shire are capable of influencing the government in much more conservative regions. This factor appears to have vital importance to the Greens' success in Byron Shire, perhaps only second to the historical and cultural mechanisms that brought the Green constituency to the area in the first place.

The controversial development issue has drawn a sizeable proportion of Green votes from a range of sectors within the community, especially when placed in juxtaposition to the exceptional natural qualities of the Shire. The actions of the previous mayor and council staff, particularly the General Manager, also played a somewhat important role in the 2004 elections which gave the Greens four seats on Council.

Finally, there is an extent to which the committed, experienced, and respected individuals that the Greens have nominated for Council have given the party a good reputation in the community and good support in organizing party operations. The work of Jan Barham and Richard Staples combined with the involvement of leaders like John

Corkill and Ian Cohen has given the Byron Shire Greens important guidance in their rise from a new local party to a majority force in the Council in less than 15 years. The future success of the Greens in Byron rests on the agenda-setting and policymaking abilities of these leaders, as well as the continued commitment of the people who elect them.

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