

Writing started 26th August 2011.
This is just the start and this will be continued.

Tweed Shire Council.

Public Service or Secret Service?

Personally, I find this really interesting so if you have the time to read on you may also find it interesting and maybe have a similar story to tell.

The initial problem here was that a council ranger came to our place to follow up a complaint by a neighbour that our dog had wandered on to his property. Big deal, neighbours dogs do that all the time around here, we look after each others pets without being asked, -- or did before this bloke came along. The neighbour in question, one John Tilden, owns some outfit called Powerbow. Apparently Powerbow are the official owners of the property. By Law he had every right to complain but it just isn't what we do around here.

Coming direct to the complainer, John Tilden or Powerbow or whatever he wants to call himself, back in June when there were some excavations going on at the John Tilden – Powerbow property, (I believe some of the excavations may have been illegal due to it being in a watercourse but that's another story and I'd welcome comment on that one) I was talking to John Tilden over the fence, he was concerned about me taking photos – (I wonder why - they are actually for a book I am writing about land care) - anyway, he said, out of the blue – “I am going to shoot your dog”. The dog in question, “Jet”, Caroline's super friendly Kelpie X, was, at that time, on his side of the fence sniffing harmlessly around – as they do – however, me being me, I said, “Go right ahead, it's not my dog”. Which it isn't, it's Caroline's dog but I knew it was an idle threat so what the heck, I'll wind him up. I reckoned that was a lovely and neighbourly thing for him to say, nice touch, idle threat or not.

So the next thing this ranger turned up and, when he thought he wouldn't be spotted, he kicked our dog. This was not a viscous attack it was, I believe, a test to see if the dog would have a go at him. The dog, “Jet”, is as placid as they come and gave no reaction. The fact the ranger had been told the dog was recovering from a serious injury, after an altercation with a Land Cruiser, including a fractured and broken pelvis, a fractured tail bone, a lung haemorrhage and numerous other minor injuries seemed to make no difference.

I complained to his boss, one Paul Brouwer. Now, Paul Brouwer told me that the neighbour, John Tilden – Powerbow had complained on no less than four occasions that there were dogs constantly “roaming on his property” and that “they”, that is, “two of them”, had killed one of his chooks. Now we get into the interesting bit, Jet, the black Kelpie X was in cage rest at the time of this alleged incident and could not have been involved. Then we have the fact that John Tilden wasn't even living at the property, the place was and still is occupied by others, I assume they are tenants. When we asked the people who actually live there about the dead chook they said the chook is fine – not dead at all but quite alive and well. So what we have is, at best, a couple of misunderstandings or

misinterpretations, at worst, a couple of pork pies told to Paul Brouwer by the complainer, this is assuming Paul Brouwer didn't make the whole thing up but I can't imagine why he would do that. However, if the ranger had been given the impression the dog he was about to visit was vicious, this may explain the kick. He may have been wondering "Where is this vicious dog"? As a sidenote, we had an RSPCA representative come here completely unannounced and without warning. He said he came without warning to "check the dogs temperament". "Jet" wanted to lick him to death, of course. But I wonder why he was here?

Then the fun started.

Tweed Shire Council, instead of simply tackling the issue, they closed ranks around their bloke and refused to communicate. We received one letter stating that they had investigated the allegation and "council" are satisfied with the result and the matter is closed. I made the perfectly reasonable request that they advise me of the outcome of the "investigation" – they would not do it. They don't care if we are happy with the decision, they don't care if the decision is accurate, they don't even want us to know what decision was made, it would seem they only want to get this out of their hair ASAP. Closed doors decisions, where is the transparency? The ranger in question, the dog kicker, phoned up and said "I didn't do it" and then hung up. We know that he did do it so I requested that, as he was so confident of his innocence, he write us a letter to the effect that he did not kick our dog - 100%. He won't do it. Why?? Because he did and he knows it.

I have since contacted the general manager of Tweed Shire, one Mike Raynor, on two occasions with absolutely no response whatsoever. This is their boss! And he would not respond.

This is what is on the Tweed Shire Council web site re their "Customer Service Charter" – but, believe me, it is not like this.

Customer Service

Policy Objectives

Tweed Shire Council is committed to striving to meet the needs of our ratepayers, residents and clients in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service.

We aim to:

- a) treat all people with respect and courtesy;
- b) listen to what residents/ratepayers have to say;
- c) respond to resident/ratepayer enquiries promptly and efficiently;
- d) act with integrity and honesty when liaising with residents/ratepayers/clients;
- e) consult residents/ratepayers and clients about service needs;

Standards Of Service

In Writing

WE WILL:

- ⌚ Respond to correspondence received from residents, ratepayers and clients (written, faxed or emailed) within fourteen (14) days, in accordance with Response to Correspondence Policy.
- ⌚ Where the correspondence cannot be responded to within 14 days will send an acknowledgement advice within the 14 days.

I would like to make it perfectly clear that our intention was never to persecute or crucify this ranger but merely to highlight the point that his behaviour was inappropriate and completely unnecessary. However, when they close ranks and build a stone wall around the problem it prolongs the process, frustrations build and a resolution becomes harder and harder to achieve.

The very best thing for this guy to have done would have been to send us a letter, or call by, and apologise for his action. Problem solved – have a cup of tea or a beer. That is how it should have been but no, they continued to “stone wall” in the hope we’d go away. As it is now, that ranger is never to set foot on this property again, Tweed Shire councils integrity and honesty is in question (yet again) and there is animosity at Crystal Creek that there should never have been. That’s what I call community building. Ho,ho.

Interestingly enough, when I first spoke to Paul Brouwer I asked – “Is it standard practice that rangers will kick a dog”? He replied – “Yes, if it is a vicious dog”. I said, “What about this dog”? He said, “Yes, if it is the dog Mark told me about on Friday”. What this tells me is that Mark, the ranger who came here and kicked our dog, did in fact kick a dog on that day. So did he kick another dog on that day, is it a habit?

So, the relatively small problem of the ranger kicking our dog has now taken a back seat to the fact that our council, the people who are paid by our rates and taxes, our employees, are not representing us correctly. There was a situation, we complained, council claim to have investigated it but would give us no information whatsoever about that investigation. Why is that? This brings me to the whole point of this which begs the question: Is the Tweed Shire Council a public service or a secret service? Are we back in the USSR in the 60’s, we have the rangers going around doing whatever they like knowing that their backside will be covered by their superiors. As a taxpayer and a ratepayer in this shire, do I have no right to know the outcome of their investigation? Do these people really believe they are an unaccountable law unto themselves? If they do, as it seems they do, and this is at local council level, then we are all in big trouble because democracy has well and truly flown the coop.

And here’s another interesting snippet.

Before the people who live on the property now came along, another girl and her family were living there, I believe she was John Tilden’s girlfriend, (she’s bugged off now) anyway, she had a Boxer named Chester. Chester, one day, did kill one of our chooks. We know it because we saw him with the dead chook on their property. We said nothing and, more interestingly, they said nothing to us, not a word. Then, one day, Chester killed another of our chooks and was in the process of killing another when I put a stop to it. Unbeknown to me, the lady owner of the dog was in hospital at the time another person came over to pick up the dog, I assume this person was the temporary administrator of the dog. Who was it came over to pick up the dog, one John Tilden. Did he apologise for the fact that his/her dog had killed one of our chooks that day? No way? Did he/they ever offer to replace the dead chooks? No way.

Just so you know, we live 16 kilometres out of Murwillumbah town, we are in the country. There are several dogs “roam” around here, they are neighbours dogs, they are our friends dogs, we accept their dogs, we look after their dogs – just as they would do for us without question. One dog in particular comes about ½ kilometre to us every time there the “parents” are away and there is going to be a thunderstorm. She gets terrified and comes here where she is always welcome, we know the

owner will come down to pick her up or she will leave of her own accord when the storm has passed. We, as a community, like it like that and don't want it to change. There are other dogs come to visit but I will not name any of them for fear of the Tweed Shire Council dog Gestapo coming to round them up.

Then we get a "corporate" move in – John Tilden and Powerbow – and it all changes overnight. During a conversation John had with Caroline he stated, "I only see this place as a resource". Great! Here we are at beautiful Crystal Creek where most of us have come to for lifestyle and then someone comes along who only see this place as a resource". Problem is, the only resource here is water. Problem is, we get plenty of rain here and the only time water would need to be drawn from the creek is in times of prolonged dry when the creek is most stressed anyway. Problem is, there are several Platypus and other animals depend on that creek for their livelihood. So now, because one corporate moves in, who doesn't even live on the property, who "only see this place as a resource" no longer can the local dogs have their freedom, no longer does the friendly cooperative nature between neighbours that has prevailed here exist, no longer can we sit around nice and relaxed knowing that our pets are safe no matter what. Silly thing is that the people who do currently live on the property are fine with everything, they are normal, sensible, understanding, rational people. Pity all neighbours aren't like that.

Now, also just so you know, our little Jack Russel X did, on her own, harass the chooks next door but she did not kill any. I will be the first to admit that she may well have killed one given time but Caroline was there, the dog wasn't "roaming" unattended, she was on the scene and made sure that no harm came to the chook. I do not condone her harassing chooks and would certainly not condone it had she killed a chook and, at very least, we would have apologised and replaced the chook had it become necessary.

Fact is, we had rescued both these dogs from the Tweed Shire Council pound only days before this incident, the Kelpie X and the Jack Russel X had only been here a few days. Things are different now all because of a ratbag neighbour "who doesn't even live on the premises". It leaves me wondering whether he is just afraid of dogs - which would go some way towards explaining his over the top actions. "I'm going to shoot your dog". Good on ya – mate! My hero! Go get your gun - mate!

I think Tweed Shire Council need to get their act together and be a bit more transparent and perhaps not dish out water licenses to corporates in an area like this. The signs council has put up say "Crystal Creek Jewel of The Tweed". Not for much longer if they carry on like this. And, somehow, I don't think Powerbow belongs here, maybe that entity would be better off based in Sydney than a lifestyle property. And this nonsense is fully supported by Tweed Shire Council. Pubic service or secret service?

To be continued: