

Green focus at four-day biodiversity conference

THE sharing of conservation strategies has been the focus of a four-day environmental biodiversity conference held in Laidley Shire last week.

The 2002 Southern Queensland Biodiversity Conference and Skills Course, staged at the Edmund Park Training and Leisure Centre at Thornton from Thursday to Sunday, saw delegates from around the State come together to discuss issues affecting biodiversity in their respective regions.

An annual event, the conference is an initiative of the Southern Queensland Biodiversity Network and is hosted in a different location each year by organisations recognised as biodiversity conservation leaders, this year being the Lockyer Catchment Association (LCA).

The Southern Queensland Biodiversity Network is an informal group that encourages and assists the conservation of south-east Queensland's rich biological diversity through sharing knowledge, promoting understanding and fostering innovation.

According to organiser Bruce Boyes, a member of the LCA, the conference was inclusive of environmentally-conscious people from all walks of life.

"It's involving more than 100 people from throughout south-east Queensland, including local governments, State government, private sector and community groups, who are getting together to share their ideas, experience and knowledge," Mr Boyes said prior to the conference.

He added that a new initiative to aid biodiversity protection would be launched at the conference.

"A highlight of the conference will be the unveiling of the new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) biodiversity planning assessments," he said.

"These assessments will be a valuable new tool for conservation across the region."

Along with the EPA, LCA and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, both Laidley and Gatton shires contributed funding and in-kind support for the conference, and the mayors of both regions were on hand to open proceedings on the Thursday.

OPENING

In his opening speech to the delegation, Gatton Shire Mayor Jim McDonald commented on a Griffith University study comparing the 90 per cent of south-east Queenslanders concerned with the loss of open space to the 83 per cent of said population who participate in environmental recreation.

Cr McDonald urged conservation groups to "recognise issues of recreation and the adaptive management that can be applied to that" based on the university figures.

Laidley Shire Mayor Shirley Pitt, whose speech cited that the Lockyer Valley was the seventh most fertile valley in the world, spoke of the importance of conservation.

"Too often we take the environment for granted — the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the bush we enjoy," Cr Pitt said.

"I believe that this natural beauty must be preserved for future generations.

"Saving biodiversity presents a great challenge of balancing productivity with conservation."

Mr Boyes said it was fitting that this year's conference was held in the Lockyer, an area in which environmental protection was valued.

"(I congratulate) both Laidley and Gatton Shire Councils for having some of the most progressive environmental policies in Australia," he said.