EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RAD NETWORK: ENVISIONING THE INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION ECONOMY

BACKGROUND

Eighty percent of the world's remaining biodiversity is on land managed by Indigenous Peoples, who have been sustainably managing their territories since time immemorial. As colonial-capitalist models continue to fall short in addressing the dual biodiversity-climate crisis, transformative opportunities exist at the intersection of Indigenous resurgence and environmental action.

The Restore, Assert and Defend (RAD) Network aims to support the work of Indigenous Nations and communities to restore relationships and Indigenous knowledge systems, assert rights and responsibilities, and defend lands and waters. Following along the path laid by the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE), RAD seeks to connect Indigenous governments and communities to each other, and to financial resources, tools, and expertise to advance Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and regenerative Indigenous-led economies.

Emerging from the work streams of the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership, since 2022, the Network has been steadily growing with strategic direction from its Leadership Group.

GATHERING: ENVISIONING PATHWAYS FORWARD

In April 2023, the RAD Network hosted a gathering entitled *Restore, Assert and Defend (RAD) Network: Envisioning the Indigenous-led Conservation Economy*. The gathering was held on the unceded and unsurrendered Territory of the Wolastoqiyik at St. Mary's First Nation, at Sitansisk (also known as Fredericton, New Brunswick). The intent of the gathering was to foster connections, deepen our understanding of the current context of the work, and to co-create a shared vision for the emergent RAD Network.

The local community, Elders, and Fire Keepers offered a very warm welcome to their territory and fostered a gathering rooted in place and enriched by ceremony, cultural teachings, and musical traditions. Our Facilitator, Erin Dixon, and Local Convenor, Patricia Saulis, led the design of an agenda that prioritized dialogue and interaction among the over 80 individuals who attended. The gathering was further enriched by Terry Young, Wolastoqiyik scholar and Knowledge Carrier from Kingsclear First Nation, who wove a traditional ash basket to reflect the spirit and intentions we collectively wove together.

Participants included Indigenous leaders, Knowledge Carriers, land guardians, Elders, youth, academics, activists, legal experts, and policy advisors, among others.

RESTORE ASSERT DEFEND
RAD
NETWORK

Stories and insights were shared from individuals pursuing initiatives from coast-to-coast-to-coast, from those with well-established IPCAs to those in the early stages of visioning, and from diverse cultural, jurisdictional, geopolitical, and ecological contexts. The dialogue was rich in stories and knowledge, which we strive to reflect more fully and sincerely in the gathering report, podcasts, and digital stories.

LOOKING AHEAD: NETWORK ACTIVITIES & OUTPUTS

Key themes of discussion included community kinship, jurisdiction, markets, policy and advocacy, values, voice and communication, youth engagement, the rights of nature, and discussions around tools that can advance our goals in these areas. The discussions distilled potential actions and outputs for the RAD Network to pursue going forward, some of which are already underway.

KEY THEMES AND POTENTIAL ACTIONS FOR THE RAD NETWORK AS IDENTIFIED BY GATHERING PARTICIPANTS:

RAD VALUES

Centre Indigenous languages in our work and ground all partnerships in reciprocity, aligning with RAD Network values, as collectively defined by the Network. Priority actions include revisiting and updating RAD Network values with collaborative input and co-creating Reciprocity Agreements with partners in alignment with RAD Network values.

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Analyze and compile funding resources/mechanisms and case studies, and dismantle and reconstruct current tools within Indigenous worldviews and RAD Network values. Priority actions include compiling a list of Indigenous-led nature-based solutions as potential case studies and developing an assessment tool for partnership building.

JURISDICTION

Develop recommendations/resources to support Indigenous Nations and communities seeking to legally assert their jurisdiction and to be prepared to respond to any attempts to takeover that jurisdiction. A priority action is to conduct interviews and record examples of guidelines for stewardship rooted in Indigenous law that takes precedence over Crown law.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Mobilize collaborative research/outreach to identify policy barriers to Indigenous-led IPCAs, carbon management, and other conservation initiatives and economies. Identify and act on critical policy windows while working toward larger scale systems change.

YOUTH

Create a RAD Network youth group and integrate with RAD leadership, providing youth with mentorship and support to lead activities such as youth-led/focused events, exchanges, intergenerational mentorship, and network building with other youth groups, among other priorities identified by youth. Key actions include recruiting leads and participants for the RAD Network youth group and providing mentorship and support for fundraising.

MARKETS

Convene nature-based solutions project developers for a critical dialogue on Indigenous rights and explore the creation of an Indigenous-led clearing house for carbon projects. In addition, explore other markets and valuation mechanisms (e.g., biodiversity, water service credits, etc.).
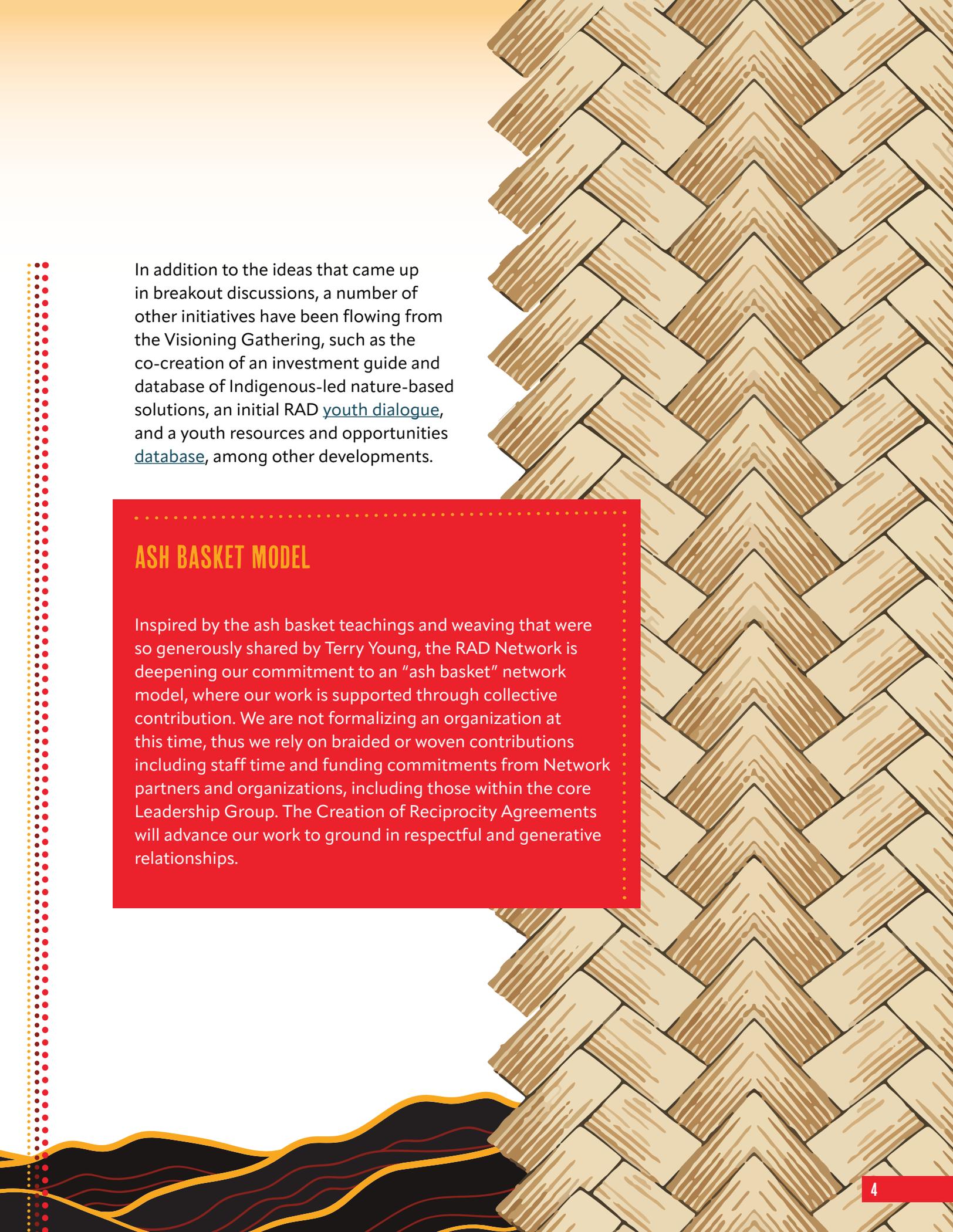
DECLARATION

Convene a roundtable and consider co-developing a declaration on the rights of nature, grounded in Natural Law and Indigenous laws, values, and knowledge systems. In addition, explore opportunities for collective action around the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

COMMUNITY KINSHIP

Support alliance building between Nations/Communities to collaboratively assess conservation finance opportunities; advocate for flexible, decolonized funding models; and incorporate fun, music, ceremony, culture, storytelling, art, language, and intergenerational learning within our work. Key outputs may include a community manual or guide to conservation finance, community engagement protocols, and stories shared via the RAD website, newsletters, and partner platforms.

VOICE AND COMMUNICATION

Broadly amplify youth voices, centre Indigenous languages, and foster Ethical Space. Priority actions include developing alternative, accessible ways to receive feedback on RAD Network activities (e.g., anonymously), as well as compiling and reframing key phrasing commonly used in the fields in which we work (e.g., reconceptualize "conservation finance").

In addition to the ideas that came up in breakout discussions, a number of other initiatives have been flowing from the Visioning Gathering, such as the co-creation of an investment guide and database of Indigenous-led nature-based solutions, an initial RAD youth dialogue, and a youth resources and opportunities database, among other developments.

ASH BASKET MODEL

Inspired by the ash basket teachings and weaving that were so generously shared by Terry Young, the RAD Network is deepening our commitment to an "ash basket" network model, where our work is supported through collective contribution. We are not formalizing an organization at this time, thus we rely on braided or woven contributions including staff time and funding commitments from Network partners and organizations, including those within the core Leadership Group. The Creation of Reciprocity Agreements will advance our work to ground in respectful and generative relationships.

NEXT STEPS

Ultimately, the gathering reaffirmed and clarified the RAD Network's priorities and provided a springboard for further action. Next steps include reaching out to members and partners to gauge interest levels and capacity, and prioritizing next steps with the guidance of our Leadership Group. Fall 2023 will also be dedicated to advancing reciprocity conversations with RAD Network partners.

As Terry Young shared, a network is like an ash basket; when many individual strands are woven together, they become one creation with a purpose: to carry something forward. Our gathering wove together stories, knowledge, and intentions, and created a strong and flexible container for the RAD Network. We look forward to working together to carry forward our shared vision for Indigenous-led regenerative economies.

> "Some of us are coming from very small communities or isolated communities and we feel powerless because we don't have the numbers, but just think what would happen if those small numbers could be empowered? So they could feel that they're not alone?"
>
> – Elder Albert Marshall

Woliwon, wela'lin, miigwetch, masih, niá:wen, Łeekoo, marsi, hai hai, anushiik, merci, thank you to all who made this gathering and collaborative work possible

We gratefully acknowledge and extend our thanks to our local hosts and Knowledge Carriers, Local Convenor, Gathering Facilitator, RAD Working Group contributors, and all the participants who shared their time, knowledge, stories, and visions for the future.

LEARN MORE & STAY CONNECTED

radpartnership@gmail.com
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Sign-up Form

METCALF FOUNDATION

conservation through reconciliation partnership

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NRDC   WWF   Ducks Unlimited Canada   nature for justice   futurearth   Natural Assets Initiative MAKING NATURE COUNT   ANWAATIN
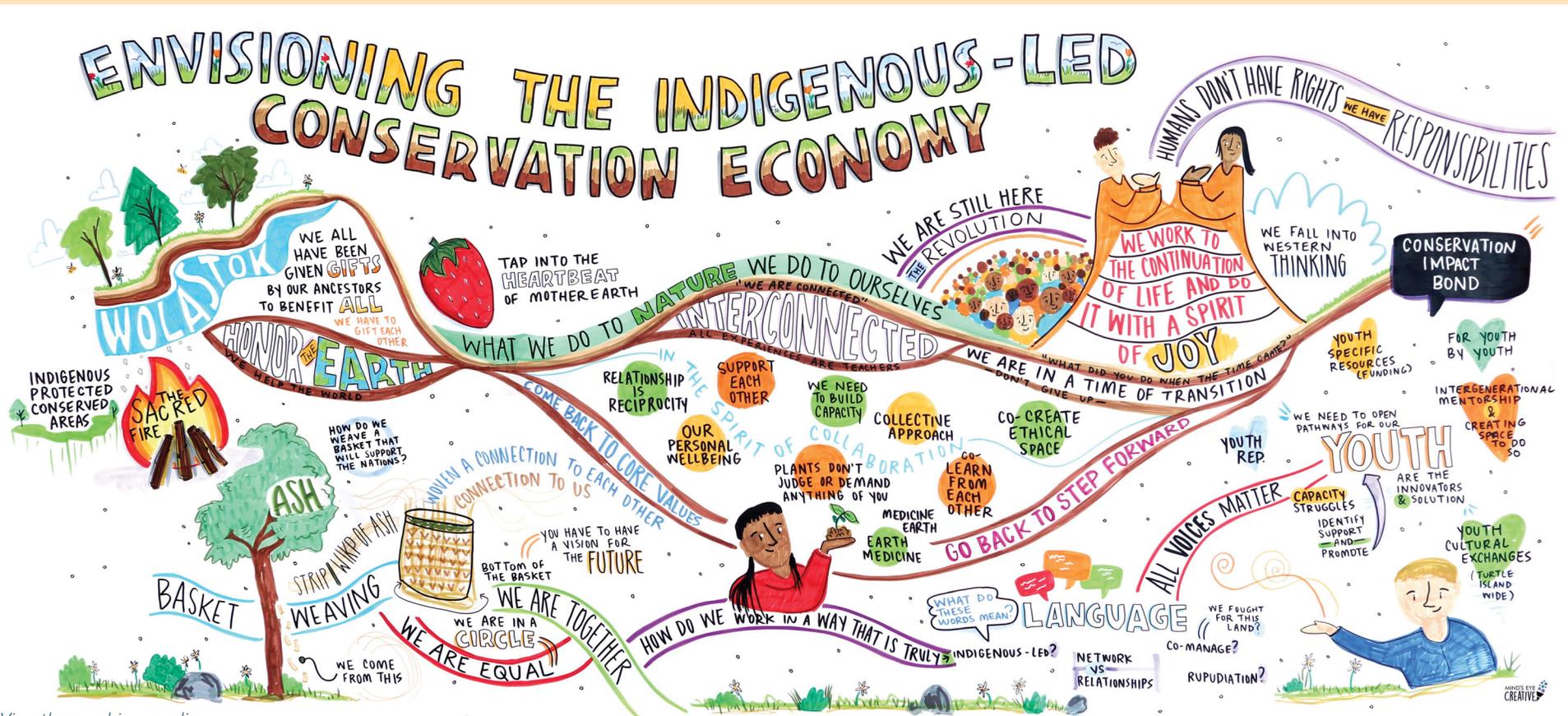
Participants at the April 2023 gathering, "Restore, Assert and Defend (RAD) Network: Envisioning the Indigenous-led Conservation Economy". (Credit: Mag Hood.)

Wolastoqiyik scholar and Knowledge Carrier, Terry Young. (Credit: Mag Hood.)

Ash basket crafted by Terry Young, holding soil from across Turtle Island. (Credit: Mag Hood.)

One of three graphic recordings from the RAD Network Visioning Gathering, created by Ashton Rodenhiser (Mind's Eye Creative).

RAD Leadership and Operations Group members with Elders Ed Perley and Ramona Nicholas who sings a traditional song dedicated to the Wolastoq river. (Credit: Mag Hood.)

The sacred fire at RAD Network gathering. (Credit: Mag Hood.)

Left to right: Elder Albert Marshall, Erin Dixon (Gathering Facilitator) and Patricia Saulis (Local Convenor). (Credit: Mag Hood.)