

S.T.E.P.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

7/6/84

PRESIDENT'S REPORT - 1984

Since we last met in this place for this purpose, a certain amount of environmental history has been written in Australia.

The wild rivers of South-West Tasmania were saved from a determined State Government by a combination of political circumstances which will probably not be repeated: citizen effort on a large scale; the passage of legislation linking Australian heritage with global heritage; and the judicial decision which validated the power of the Commonwealth to set aside from development areas of international importance as part of that heritage.

In NSW, the State Government has just passed the second of two Acts which have secured the major areas of rainforest in the State as national parks, nature reserves, and flora reserves, implementing a wise decision to save rainforest en bloc rather than piecemeal over a number of years.

In the Northern Territory, the second stage of Kakadu National Park was recently declared, and a third stage is planned.

Late in 1983, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was augmented to occupy about 98% of its possible area - also a great advance.

However, there were also lows on the national scene. The Federal Government failed to honour its promises in regard to a full commitment to soil conservation and in regard to uranium development, and is currently resisting taking action under its new World Heritage legislation or by other means to save the magnificent lowland tropical rainforest in Cape Tribulation National Park, North Queensland, from the disruption of an unnecessary road.

The nation's environmental troubles extend all the way from national and state levels to the local scene. STEP's main concern is the maintenance of the local bushlands centred on the upper Lane Cove River, in as healthy and undisturbed condition as possible. Over the years, STEP has had considerable success in creating environmental awareness in the local community and the local council, and in influencing to some extent the course of events affecting our bushlands.

Earlier in its history, STEP produced in book form a Management Plan for its area. This has attracted wide attention, evidenced by the fact that nearly 800 copies have been sold. We also persuaded Council, not without difficulty, to withhold from control burning our area for fire protection purposes, while we substituted our own hand clearing method.

We have also made a modest but effective input into bush regeneration, using the now famous Bradley method.

Our efforts in these fields virtually resulted in the formation of a council Bushland Working Party, upon which we have at present two representatives - Helen Petersen and John Burke.

During 1983-84, STEP has continued its involvement with these matters. Last year, the President identified those areas of bushland within STEP's fuel reduction area which needed further attention, and these have been worked upon over the period. Some annual maintenance is now necessary, and a part of the area was worked over recently. Annual maintenance involves mainly only light raking of excessive dry litter. It is however a case of many hands making light work, and unless citizen participation can be maintained, STEP will eventually have to abandon the project to the tender mercies of the control burners.

Weedy areas can only be restored to native bushland by careful weeding and treatment - that is, by the Bradley method, which is carried on by a STEP group on a regular basis. However, the number taking part is rather low, and we could do with some additional pairs of hands. Anyone willing to learn the necessary skills is welcome to join this group.

A Tracks Committee was set up in July, and has done some investigation into maps and routes for local walking tracks. STEP hopes eventually to publish information which will assist walkers to derive full advantage from the use of the many tracks which traverse our bushlands.

Two bushwalks have been held. The first was on August 21st, when we took our walkers along the STEP track which had been constructed several years ago with minimal bush disturbance. 20 attended. The second was held during Heritage Week this year, and we repeated a walk which we led some time ago in the more northerly part of the Valley. Attendance was around 45.

In August 1983, STEP held a special MEET THE CANDIDATES meeting, in which aspiring Ku-ring-gai councillors were given the chance to state their policies and plans if elected, and submitted to questions. After the election, STEP decided to request Council to change the paired system of electing councillors for a more modern one, as the paired system allows a candidate to be elected simply because he/she is linked to the candidate polling the highest number of votes.

The Council Bushland Working Party was reconvened after the election, and the chairmanship of Clr Craig Ramsay. STEP members Helen Petersen and John Burke are still on the committee. It is hoped that adequate funding will be provided to enable effective functioning. A priority target is to push a plan of management for the Municipality bushlands, and a sub-committee has been appointed to do that.

STEP moved three motions to the Annual Conference of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW in October. The following were resolved:

that the NCC

1. investigate applying for grants for environmental projects through the Community Employment Program;
2. write to all nurseries, local councils, and the Forestry Commission requesting a halt to the sale of plants which become pests;
3. write to commercial users of timber, asking them not to use rainforest timbers.

Implementation will depend on some input from STEP. This is proceeding no earlier this year, STEP joined the growing number of environmental organisations applying for Community Employment Program (CEP) funding in its second round. It was decided to seek help for restoring The Diatrema, a local gully of true rainforest adjacent to Brown's Field, Wahroonga, which will involve a small team and a great deal of careful weeding. Along with other groups, we await the response of the Office of Special Employment.

The program of environmental instruction for South Turramurra Primary School under the DUSO program was completed early in the period. Thanks go to Robin Ruys for the initiation and much of the carrying out of the project and to Janet Catford for help with the latter.

Helen Petersen made STEP's submission to the Federal Inquiry into the Environmental Effects of Bushfires, conducted by the Standing Committee on Environment and Conservation. This was chaired by Peter Milton, and one of its members is the Member for Gordon and Shadow Minister for Environment, David Connolly. Representatives of STEP and WEPA (Willoughby Environment Protection Association) accompanied members of this Committee on a field inspection to various parts of the Northern Metropolitan area bushlands, and were given the opportunity to show them samples of STEP's work on fuel reduction by hand clearing, which appeared to impress them sympathetically. Later, those representatives presented oral evidence to the Inquiry in Sydney.

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*acting on a proposal by Janet Catford,*

A few months ago, STEP organised and provided for a barbecue evening to which all citizens who have over the years participated in bushland fuel reduction by hand clearing to reduce bushfire hazard were invited. Around 30 attended, and the evening was considered a great success. It was held outside the home of Janet and Alan Catford, and the latter delivered a short address appreciating the work of the citizens and exhorting them to continue the good work on an annual basis.

Two general meetings have been held, both featuring talks with colour slides:

On November 2nd, Ian Dunlop presented a talk entitled "Kakadu", in which he concentrated largely on the Aboriginal rock art of this magnificent Top End national park.

On 12th March, Jack Parnell presented "Birds of the Near Inland", in which he demonstrated a great talent for bird photography combined with a simple and effective style of delivery.

One Committee member was lost earlier in 1984 - Syd Hume, who moved to more northerly parts. Two members have been co-opted - Glen Thompson and John Burke, both of whom are making useful contributions.

Secretary Yvonne Langshaw, ~~with her usual initiative and industry,~~ proposed, drafted, and had printed a leaflet inviting membership of STEP. This green production (show to audience) has been widely distributed, and is resulting in a healthy increase in membership.

Finally, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to all those Committee members who have helped so well to keep STEP functioning over the year. May the incoming committee be even more industrious and effective. Particular thanks are due to the person reading this report - Yvonne Langshaw, both for this favour and for her stirring work as Secretary during the year.

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