

Annual Report for the Year to October 2013

The past year has seen plenty of new developments, some good but others with ominous implications for Sydney's bushland and the environment in general. The driving force behind current issues is the usual factor of the mantra of economic growth. The main issues are mentioned in this report and more details have been provided in past issues of STEP Matters that have been sent to members and are on our website.

Committee

The achievements of STEP rely upon the active work of the Committee in providing ecological and land use information for understanding what is going on in our neighbourhood and input to submissions. Once again Helen Wortham has done a great job of keeping our records together, organising events and proofreading our publications.

Steve Procter has stepped down as Treasurer. He has done a great job of keeping track of our finances. Jim Wells, a former Treasurer still provides invaluable assistance with our accounts. Frank Budai who has been a member of STEP for over ten years has volunteered to assume the role of Treasurer. He has extensive experience in managing the accounts of several charities and other volunteer organisations.

We urge all members to consider nominating for the Committee. We are always on the lookout for people with experience that can contribute to our work. We also welcome members who are willing to help out with a particular project or issue.

Publications

This year we launched another publication thanks to the enthusiasm of John Martyn for the natural world and photography. This time he has produced a book entitled *Understanding the Weather: A Guide for Outdoor Enthusiasts in Southeastern Australia*. John's books and maps are an invaluable source of funds for STEP's activities. Our other publications continue to sell steadily despite the increasing prevalence of ebooks and map apps.

Accounts

Our finances remain sound. We incurred the cost of publication of the Weather Book during the year so had a small decline in net assets. The book was launched in June so the income from sales will commence this financial year.

We have maintained our Environment Protection Fund that provides for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status for donations. The purpose of the Fund is to support STEP's environmental objectives. This Fund now comes under the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. We received a total of \$715 in donations in the past financial year.

Hugh Roberts and Michelle Leishman have been serving on the Committee of Management of the EPF as independent members who have been appointed to positions with broader responsibilities to the community than just the STEP Committee. Hugh Roberts has recently resigned from the Committee after many years of service. We appreciate the huge contribution that Hugh, with his legal expertise and past role as treasurer, has made to the operations of STEP.

Electronic Media

Our website remains an important source of information about our activities and contains copies of our submissions to local and state governments on current issues and development proposals.

We have finally moved further into the digital age by setting up a Facebook page and a Twitter account. Links are on our home internet page (www.step.org.au). We are very grateful for the brilliant work of Trish Lynch in managing the Facebook page and John Burke's incisive Tweets. So please "like" us on Facebook and "follow" us on Twitter to demonstrate the level of interest in our work and discover links to other likeminded organisations.

Education

We continue to support the Young Scientist Awards run by the NSW Science Teachers Association with a prize in the environmental sustainability category. It is

encouraging to see the quality of the innovative ideas presented in the student's projects.

Talks

We organised four public talks this year on the Great North Walk and the Wildwalks website, John Martyn's Weather Book, Ku-ring-gai Council's water management programs and tsunamis. Professor Ian Lowe delivered a wide ranging and informative STEP Lecture on the Challenge of a Sustainable Future last November.

Walks

STEP organises a walk every month or two (seven since our last AGM) with a focus on the beauty of Sydney's bushland and environment. We aim to encourage new walkers so most walks are not very arduous. We thank Frank Freeman, Andrew Little, John Martyn and Jill Green for organising and leading walks this past year. If you have a request for a walk please let us know.

Newsletter

Our newsletter, STEP Matters, is our main means of communicating events, our activities and issues with our members. We have a focus on local issues and welcome alerts from our members of local events and developments for inclusion in future editions and, of course, feedback on articles is always welcome. The newsletter helps maintain the high profile of STEP. For this reason we have resisted pressure to send out copies by email where they can easily be lost amongst the huge volume of email that seems to hit us all. Past editions are available on our website.

Environmental Issues

The major issues for STEP over the past year have, once again, been threats to national parks from proposed mountain bike, horse riding trails and other uses that conflict with their chief purpose of conservation. State wide we continue to be concerned about development of mines and coal seam gas projects with inadequate research and precautions to prevent environmental damage that will harm future generations. Hanging over our heads is the State Government's new planning system with legislation to be

finalised very soon. Some amendments have been made to the original drafts but growth and developer interests still seem to be being given undue priority over community and the environment. At the local level the sale of community land and the revision of the Ku-ring-gai Local Environment Plan are current being monitored closely.

The recreational hunting in national parks issue has provided one significant piece of good news. The Game Council has been abolished and the State Government is changing the original recreational hunting proposals to ensure close supervision of hunters and selection of hunting areas. The actual implementation is still unclear and subject to the results of a trial in some national parks.

Outlook for 2014

The Abbott Coalition government has threatened to pass several federal environmental control powers to the States and will overturn the Labor Government's climate change policies. We expect to have a busy year responding to the detail of the new policies that, from information available so far, appear to significantly weaken protections.

Jill Green
October 2013