



STEP INC.

Community Based Environmental Conservation since 1978

P.O. Box 697 Turramurra 2074

NEWSLETTER

No 52, August 1991

AGM

Our annual general meeting will be held at 7.45 pm on Thursday 26th September at St Andrews Hall on the corner of Vernon and Chisholm Streets, Turramurra. This will, as usual, be a short meeting followed by a speaker of note.

TAKEN FOR GRANTED AUTHOR SPEAKS TO STEP

A most important recent contribution to the fight for understanding and conservation of urban bushland was the publication in late 1990 of Doug Benson and Jocelyn Howell's book Taken for Granted, which is the story of the bushland of Sydney and its suburbs. Jocelyn will be speaking about the book and therefore about the history of Sydney's bushland, the current position and what hope there is for conservation into the future.

She has great slides which there wasn't room for in the book and her talk will be a fascinating experience for anyone interested in urban bushland. Write the date in your diary now!!

MEET THE CANDIDATES

Meetings to meet the candidates for the council elections in September will be held in every Ward and STEP has agreed to do this in Comenarra. (Those in other Wards watch the newspapers).

Our meeting will be at St Andrews

Hall, corner Vernon and Chisholm Streets, Turramurra on Thursday 29th August at 8 pm. This is a great opportunity for Comenarra people to assess the candidates who will affect our lives so much for the next four years.

SEE YOU THERE

STEP'S ROLE REVIEWED

STEP was founded on the 12th April 1978 to fight the destruction of bushland in construction of the Canon Rd netball courts. That particular battle was lost but STEP continued on to fight for the natural environment of Ku-ring-gai and surrounding areas. The committee often discusses how we can be most effective.

More Socialising?

Occasionally we are told that we don't hold enough bushwalks and other functions and we would like feedback from members on this. At present we have about four functions for members each year, often two bushwalks and two evening functions with speakers.

In the early years STEP pioneered bush regeneration in Ku-ring-gai and devised the STEP method of selective hand clearing for bushfire hazard reduction. This necessarily involved members physically working and it was the best way for us to be effective in bringing about change.

Start a Regen Group

The position is different now,

however, in that bush regeneration and associated management is established throughout the community. There are hundreds of trained people working in bush regeneration and there is even a TAFE course on it. Any STEP member who wants to become involved in bush regeneration work can now join a group or start a group. We think there is no point in putting a lot of time into an issue which has been won when there are plenty of other problems which have yet to be tackled.

We see our role, therefore, as;

* building STEP into a more effective organisation for influencing council and government policy. We can do this through having policies on issues and effectively presenting them.

*securing a large membership base to give weight to our initiatives. Over the past few years we have built membership from about 120 to the present 360 and hope to reach 400 by the Council elections in September.

*identifying long term issues which will be the environmental problems of the future and influencing community attitudes towards them. An example of this was the freeway position paper produced in 1987 which was helpful when the proposals for the Lane Cove Valley freeway came along a couple of years later.

We hope that any member who has a view on where we should be putting our efforts will get in touch.

COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Council elections will be held on Saturday 14th September. Nominations have not yet closed but we understand that the two Roseville Ward aldermen will be retiring as will one from Comenarra. We hear that Peter Derwent and David Barnett will be standing again in Gordon and Richard Geddes in Wahroonga.

Lindfield businessman and environmentalist Robert Pallin will be standing in Roseville and Elaine Malicki will be standing in Comenarra. STEP endorses both of these candidates.

There is also a possibility that Janet Fairlie-Cunninghame and Caron Morrison will stand. Janet is President of KUBES and Caron is an expert on traffic matters. Both would be excellent candidates.

We shall be assessing all the candidates once nominations have closed and shall circulate the results to members.

RICHARD LENNON

Richard Lennon has advised us that he won't be standing for Council again in September after a remarkable 17 years as an alderman, 7 as Mayor.

Now STEP has not always agreed with Richard but we should acknowledge that, firstly, he has been an excellent representative - always approachable and concerned. Secondly, he has been willing and able to adapt to and participate in the growing environmental consciousness. For instance he was instrumental in the formation of the Bushland Management Working Party 10 years ago and has made Ku-ring-gai a leader in recycling.

While regretting that he hasn't given us enough time to change his mind about the wisdom of planting

Liquidambers on the Comenarra Parkway we must thank him for his enormous contribution to Ku-ring-gai and to its environment.

We wish him well for the future.

LANE COVE VALLEY TCM

The State Government has established a Total Catchment Committee for the Lane Cove River Valley under the Catchment Management Act 1989. The purpose is the "co-ordinated and sustainable use and management of land, water, vegetation, fauna and other natural resources."

STEP applauds this initiative which is being managed by the Water Board. We have put a lot of effort into achieving a uniform management approach to urban bushland and this may be an important advance. STEP has been appointed to the TCM and will keep you informed of its progress.

THE BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT WORKING PARTY

The BMWP is a committee of Ku-ring-gai Council which was formed 10 years ago. Its members include nominees of STEP and KUBES, experts from universities or government and members of the public. It functioned in its early years as an agent for change as the new concepts of bushland management were introduced to Council.

Once a professional bushland management staff was established, however, the Working Party's role changed to one of working with the staff to set community priorities and to assess new developments in what is still a very new field.

The main problem and frustration has always been the lack of funds in the face of budget stringency and competition from projects

more favoured by aldermen and staff.

Applications for membership of the Working Party should be called after the September elections and STEP members with an interest should consider applying.

FISH UPDATE

STEP committee member John Martyn last reported to us on the fish population in Twin Creeks Reserve in Newsletter No 47 last year. Here is a somewhat more optimistic follow up. (Twin Creeks is the reserve in the valley formed between Fox Valley Road and Kissing Point Road).

"It is more than a year since I last reported on fish and the state of the creeks in the Twin Creeks reserve, and the weather pattern has changed markedly in this time.

The long dry spell of the past summer has stabilised the creek system somewhat, in that the urban runoff and sewerage leakage has been minimal and the water quality has at least looked better. Still there is no evidence of a general return of native fish to most of the creeks, but the residual population in the Browns Field watercourse near the Comenarra Parkway has thrived.

The once-juvenile gudgeon have grown to several centimetres, and hopefully will either have bred, or will do so soon. In addition several *Galaxias* (native trout), which migrate to and from the harbour, became stranded in pools by low water levels. An alert, active fish, these seemed to thrive in their long, forced imprisonment in a sometimes doubtful environment, evidence that the background, spring-fed creek water is still good, and that it is the extra load in times of flood that does the damage.

I have not had a hard look at the water since the recent heavy rain,

it is still somewhat discoloured by flood. I shall undertake a more extensive fish hunt after there has been a long sunny spell."

THE STEP TRACK

In the early years of STEP a track was developed in South Turramurra bushland to show some of the beautiful and diverse vegetation communities which range from dry heath to wet creeks.

Ku-ring-gai Council, with the assistance of a Sports and Recreation grant, intends to upgrade the track and provide appropriate signs. Work is due to commence early in 1992.

HOW MANY PEOPLE?

A common thread running through our submissions over the past few years has been the link between population growth and environmental degradation.

Urban freeway proposals such as Wolli Creek and the Lane Cove Valley Freeway, the pollution of the Hawkesbury, the smog problem in western Sydney, the bulldozing of huge tracts of pristine bushland for suburbs such as Cherrybrook, the shortage of tip sites and many others are all examples.

So long as Sydney keeps growing exponentially these problems will be with us but as soon as we have an end limit for population we can plan and build an infrastructure to suit.

Current Planning

The State Government is taking steps to increase the density of settlement both in existing and new suburbs under the name of urban consolidation. This has benefits for use of existing infrastructure and for reducing the cost of new development. Pursuit of this policy

will, however, see the demise of the quarter acre block and the end of what are probably the world's best urban living conditions.

The Government seems to accept that population in Sydney will increase at about 1% per annum. This means that it will double to 7,000,000 within 70 years. The consequences of this would be unacceptable to most people. With 3,500,000 people we already have huge problems.

Lack of Vision

The Minister for Housing Mr Schipp said recently (SMH 11-6-91) that "There was unnecessary hysteria about the environmental effects of proposed residential expansion for Sydney's west...." and "...those people calling for a moratorium or a halt to development in the west had no solutions to how the Government was going to deal with the needs of the city's growing population." It does not seem to have occurred to him that the Government's role is to find those solutions. The community should be able to rely on the Government to address these issues but neither the last Labor or the present Coalition Government seem willing to even discuss the problem.

There is no doubt that our population growth will eventually stop. But will this occur naturally when we have high rise, high density from mountains to sea? Or should the community plan for a Sydney which retains predominately low density housing, which retains urban bushland and which avoids the social and environmental degradation which will come with the unlimited growth option?

It would be good to hear from any STEP members who have a view on this subject.

THE TREE PRESERVATION ORDER

A member has complained that we seldom mention the TPO and its problems. The reasons are that Ku-ring-gai has an effective TPO, that there is sound community support for it and that, unlike other issues, the loss of a tree can be rectified by planting another one while the effects of loss of bushland or of developmental controls are often impossible to reverse.

We are concerned, however, at the gradual loss of tree cover which is occurring throughout the municipality. Aerial photos indicate that the older suburbs have consistently lost cover over the years.

We are also concerned at the apparent failure of Council to implement its own Planting Guidelines for Street Trees and we shall be taking this up with Council after the elections.

There are some difficult areas here. For instance STEP does not condone the presence of Camphor laurels and yet they are the dominant trees in some of our older and more picturesque streets. The Planting Guidelines give rational solutions to this and to the many other problems we have and should be fully implemented.

ISSUES IN BRIEF

Some short updates on issues covered in recent newsletters.

The Bush School

Debate is continuing as to the size and location of the school hall. A public meeting on 25th June voted overwhelmingly for the hall to be located away from the sensitive regeneration area in front of the school. This was supported by a poll of teachers at the school by a margin of 21 to 3 with 5 having no preference.

F-3 Ramps

The debate on this issue continues at a furious pace with the letters columns providing more entertainment than usual. There seems to be a strong majority community understanding that the ramps will be a disaster for the affected suburbs but STEP will continue to monitor the situation.

Mona Vale Road

The recycling centre on the tree lopping tip site was approved by Council. We are still opposed to

this but recognise that its approval perhaps offers the best opportunity for the leachate, weed and incursion (into Davidson SRA) problems to be resolved. Our objective must now be to change community attitudes so that waste is minimised on the one hand and paid for by its generators on the other. We hope that in not too many years there will be a great reduction in vegetation waste and a regional approach to its disposal so that this operation, in the midst of a State Recreation Area, can be closed down.

President

John Burke

116 Browns Rd, Wahroonga
487 3680

Secretary

Sue Jones

40 Howson Ave, Turramurra
449 4718

Sender: STEP Inc
P.O. BOX 697
TURRAMURRA 2074