



# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 72 June 1995

**DIARY DATES** In the absence of STEP events within the next month, we give you a number of other events, which may be of interest: --

1 The North Shore Group of the Society for Growing Australian Plants conducts a Tuesday Walks and Talks Program at the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden from 10am to 12 noon on the following days: --

June 27 A longer walk with discussion of environmental issues. (Bring lunch)

July 25 Acacias, the Wattles.

August 1 How plants are named.

August 8 Rutaceae. Boronias and Eriostemons.

August 15 Epacridaceae. Epacris and Woollisia.

August 22 Fabaceae. The Pea Flowers.

August 29 Summary: Identifying common plant families.

SGAP have also organised Paul D'Hondt (National Arborists Association) to speak about "Caring for your Trees" on August 11.

Contact Val 848 2106, or Pat 477 3023, or Margaret 489 2960.

2 W.E.P.A. organises a series of Speaker Meetings, and the next one is on July 10, where Danny Ondinea, Bush Regenerator and Landscape Designer, talks about "Designing Native Gardens for Wildlife".

W.E.P.A. is also conducting a bushwalk in Manly Dam Reserve on August 13.

3 The Wilderness Society is sponsoring a 2 day conference entitled "WILD AGENDA -- Protecting and Celebrating Wilderness" on July 1 and 2. Contact 948 7862.

## RUMINATIONS

There are many positive things happening in mid-1995 and we want to tell you about some of them. But first some preamble.

In the early years STEP was focused on the preservation of urban bushland, but our emphasis soon changed to the activities which threatened bushland. We were apprehensive lest we be found to be shortsighted, or nimbyish and seen to be wanting to preserve a few patches of scrub at the expense of facilities that the community valued more highly. Were not roads essential - did we not all use them every day? Why should not the population of Ku-ring-gai increase - surely it was selfish to deny others the enjoyment of such a lovely area? And just what was wrong with the old bus company we have all travelled on since we were kids being allowed to settle in bushland on Mona Vale Rd?

To our immense surprise and delight

the answers to these and all the other questions fell into place once the underlying assumptions, the implications and the consequences were looked at more critically. Roads were worse than useless if all they did was alter the demographics and make road congestion and travel times worse. Seriously increasing the population of Ku-ring-gai cannot be achieved without destroying the very qualities which make it attractive. And the bus company has no more right to public bushland on Mona Vale Road than any other local business.



What became very apparent was the short timeframe that was applied to these problems by most of the participants. Environmentalists said not to worry about the freeway because it was 10 years away, the Government said that urban

consolidation would "save" urban bushland when it meant "reprieve", and aldermen said not to worry about Mona Vale Road because the bus company was only one little business next to the already developed driver training centre and the disastrous tree lopping tip.

At STEP it was obvious to us that we were fighting for permanent results rather than temporary fixes and that the four year terms of local and state governments were a major obstacle. All of this, however, has given us a conceptual framework within which to work and a sense of optimism that some permanent gains are possible.

## HARD DECISIONS

We reported to you of progress with the UTS access road in the April newsletter. The road to Lady Game Drive will proceed and the major area of bushland on the UTS site will be permanently preserved under a Conservation Agreement.

Soon, however, a major scar will appear through bushland as the road is built. The emotional reaction in all of us will be strong. Why this vandalism?

When you look at the destruction, project yourself 100 years hence in your mind and see all the bushland, other than the new road, still there and compare this with the alternative of the whole site covered in university buildings and facilities. Just as a bushfire is usually a process of renewal rather than destruction this road is the price of permanent preservation.

Agreeing to the destruction of bushland is dreadfully difficult and the umbrella group of which we are a member, the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) was unable to make the leap from short term preservation to the long term. After silence from the NCC for years as our approach was spelt out in these newsletters it weighed in at the eleventh hour and opposed us. We hope to have the opportunity to discuss the whole subject with them.

Our view is that today's battle is won with the Conservation Agreement, there may be future battles to ensure that the Agreement is honoured, but without the Agreement the war would surely be lost.

If any members disagree with us on any issue please speak up. Otherwise you are stuck with the Committee's views.

## COMMUNITY POWER

The bushcare programme implemented by Ku-ring-gai over the last ten years or so has been a great success with some 700 volunteers now at work in bush regeneration.

A great example of the power of local enthusiasm is the Heritage Park at The Broadway, Wahroonga. Driven by Pat Stewart and Harry and Neroli Lock, the project has the

support of the local community, local Councillor Elaine Malicki, Council staff and STEP. The primary work of turning what was deteriorating wasteland into a regenerated bushland park is done. The Sunday morning workers have now turned their attention to other aspects of the bushland-development interface in Fox Valley.

With projects like this happening all over Ku-ring-gai there is real cause for hope for a better urban future.



## MONA VALE ROAD

The long fight to halt the incremental development in the bushland on Mona Vale Road from St Ives continues. The St Ives Progress Association has done some excellent work here in exposing the process through which the Bus Company was granted a lease over bushland in the corridor, by looking at documents obtained under the Freedom of Information process. The political processes, which were at work here, are frightening and there are excellent grounds for proposing that the Government have another look at the whole question.

Further developments include advice from the RTA and the NSW Police Service opposing the location of the bus depot on Mona Vale Road on safety grounds.

The fact of the matter is that the Bus Company can have no better claim on Mona Vale Road than any local business and it is 1000 to 1 that other businesses would follow if the Bus Company wins this one. The bushland corridor has fundamental importance, because it sits on top of Ku-ring-gai Chase and Garigal National Parks, because it is

the last undeveloped ridgetop defining the Sydney Harbour catchment, because it provides an aesthetically desirable contrast to the adjacent built environment but most of all because it is bushland. The other problem site in the corridor is the old council tree lopping tip. This has been cleaned up after many years of mismanagement, but is far from being good bushland. There have been various proposals for its use, but considerations to be weighed include noise affecting residents, runoff into Garigal National Park and the setting of precedent which will be used to support further development proposals.

## URBAN FREEWAYS

The M2 debate, while coming too late to prevent wholesale bushland destruction, is educating the community in the effects of radial urban freeways. Some good will flow from that, even if the disastrous socio-economic consequences of that road cannot be averted.

The newspapers have been printing occasional letters demanding that the F3 be extended from Pearce's Corner to Ryde and we can expect this debate to be a constant factor in the years ahead. Building this road (the B2 or its variant the B3) will add to the tolls collected on the M2 and thus there will be constant economic incentive. In addition the traffic on the Pacific Highway is now doubling every fifteen years and congestion is going to get much worse from Wahroonga to the city.

It's interesting to look at the demographic changes wrought by the F3. Traffic on it has far exceeded any RTA predictions as people have made lifestyle decisions based on the improved accessibility to the Central Coast.

One only has to see the huge suburbs and shopping centres sprouting out of farmland at places

like Tuggerah to understand what is happening. People are buying the cheaper homes and still driving to work in Sydney.

They will stop doing this of course only when the F3 becomes so congested that they will prefer to catch the train, get a local job or move house.

So in the absence of a halt to population growth the main effect of freeways will be demographic changes which defeat the reason for the good roads in the first place.

Building the B2 will provide additional lanes from Pearce's Corner, which will be used up by extra traffic within a few years, but which will do nothing to relieve congestion on the Pacific Highway and other local roads.

## GROWTH

The new State Government has called for a halt to population growth in Sydney.

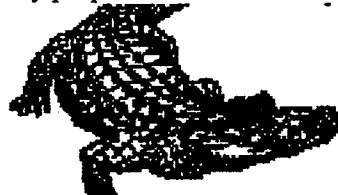
We can scarcely believe it! After years of writing to the politicians and getting nothing resembling a reasonable response they have suddenly seen the light.

Recent events such as the M2 debate have highlighted some of the absurd development proposals for Sydney. The M2 leads to the N-W Sector development where infrastructure installation is in full swing. Here we are going to put a city of 250,000 with only the M2 to cope with the additional transport needs.

It is patently obvious that the M2 can only be of use in relieving congestion around Ryde and other areas if it is not swamped by additional traffic which exceeds its capacity. This is the cruel hoax which is being played upon the people who are supporting the road. It will make their problems worse rather than better while destroying a large part of their local environment. If the N-W Sector is

cancelled and Sydney adopts zero population growth then there just may be some short term benefit from projects such as the M2. But in the medium term people would still use it to live far from their work and demographic effects would ensure that congestion prevailed.

We would, however, rather believe in the tooth fairy than cancellation of the N-W project. There are powerful vested interests which feed off population growth. The big building and building supply companies would be hard hit if new house building was to stop. In fact we would not advocate an abrupt halt to all construction, albeit that elimination of windfall profits to land speculators in the N-W Sector would carry some social benefits. Massive changes to the economy need to be phased in over many years so that the affected industry can adjust without harming the many people who work within it.



## KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL

Bushland management in Ku-ring-gai has gone through a phase where perhaps there has been more action in the offices than in the field. The bushcare programme continues its impressive progress but in other areas the results are not so good.

Constant office and field staff turnover has destabilised the Parks Department and robbed it of talent. Organisational environment and pay rates probably need review.

The Council bush regeneration team is nominally six people but this is often at about half strength because of resignations. There has been debate about how to most effectively deploy this team and a

new 5 year strategy is now in its final stages of preparation.

This has been considered by the Bushland Management Working Party which has had considerable input.

The strategy is an admission of defeat, an admission that Council does not have the resources to do anything but the most basic work. No creek lines or fringe areas will be treated.

The fact of the matter is that the staff devoted to bushland management by Council is totally inadequate.

The team of one technical officer and five field staff, including one horticultural apprentice, is expected to care for 1,100 hectares of bushland. This commitment has been constant for years and has not improved under the current Council, where the majority of Councillors have sound environmental credentials. We wonder why.

There are other areas where progress seems minimal. Perimeter drainage does not exist except as prototypes, and rehabilitation of playing fields' interface with bushland has not happened. There is an absence of coordination between field staff carrying out other works and those responsible for bushland management.

Recent examples include the resurfacing of roads with fine blue metal rolled into a thin layer of bitumen - most of the nutrient rich metal ends up in bushland where it degrades the bush. Recent clearing of bush along the edge of the fire trail in Blackbutt Reserve at Gordon is another example where insensitive hacking at the bush has been compounded by leaving all the debris to act as a fire hazard.

There is much work to be done for Council to achieve best practice or a measure of quality assurance in the management of its natural areas. We, as the community, need to urge Council to do better, and support Councillors and staff in their efforts.

## **PAM MORSE BEQUEST**

STEP recently received a bequest of \$5000 from the estate of Pam Morse, who died in the latter half of last year after a long illness. Pam was introduced to STEP by Margaret Tuckson, who has fond memories of Pam as a friend ..... "She enthusiastically followed the principles of bush regeneration from that time on, and spent much time and effort on removing weeds from her lovely bit of blue gum forest and garden.....". Yvonne Langshaw also remembers, when she was President of STEP, discussing with Pam what to do about the problems in the blue gum forest:..."She worked tirelessly to clear the.....(weeds)....and worried about what would become of her garden when she could no longer care for it"...Margaret Tuckson continues:"...in recent years she tried to get something done.....in the blue gum gully behind the Franklin's parking area...(and)...together with other STEP members had some success with it".. (We can report that Council is now also taking a hand , and the Turramurra bushcare group is tackling the problem vigorously, ie. her efforts, by example, are bearing fruit).

Pam was a creative and successful potter, and just before her death had a large number of her works selected for the Manly Art Gallery's ceramic collection.

Pam Morse was Secretary of STEP for a short period, and her support for the principles and objectives of STEP is amply demonstrated by her very generous bequest.

Your Committee is now looking for an appropriate application of the interest, generated annually while preserving the principal, to promote those principles and objectives. Some ideas have been discussed, but further suggestions would be very welcome. We owe Pam's memory the duty to ensure that the most effective use is made.

**SENDER**  
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Financial to July 95

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## **TAIL ENDER**

When a fellow traveller was recently talking about his retreat in a rainforest, we were reminded that a "greenie" is someone who has a hut in the wilderness, while a "developer" is someone who wants to build one. Makes you think, doesn't it?

But on the other hand the "developer", who builds his hut sensitively, is better than the person who has one and trashes the surroundings.

As ever, there are many shades of grey, or green, to consider, as nothing is ever black and white, or red and green, and the test is whether the building of the hut leaves the rest of the world worse off, by destruction of habitat or species, by downstream pollution, or by the insidious incremental effect, which allows us to argue that this particular hut does not matter, etc. This line of thought leads us inexorably to the conclusion that population control, that dreaded concept, whether at local level, or globally, comes into the equation. And that really needs to make us think, since the only certainty about that is, that it is not easy to find an acceptable solution at this stage of mankind's philosophical, religious, social, physical and technological development.

A few generations ago there seemed to be no limit to the resources of this planet, and hence we went out and multiplied, pioneered, developed etc. One generation ago this was no longer so certain, but technological progress seemed to provide a future fix. Now the limits of this Earth are in sight, and no macrotechnofix is yet in evidence.