



# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 96 July 1999

## COMING EVENTS

**Pied Currawongs** - On Wednesday 21st July, 1999, Dr. Richard Major will talk about his research into pied currawongs and their effect on other birds in the urban bushland. His work has been previously featured in an ABC documentary. Dr. Major is an ecologist and research scientist at the Australian Museum, who has dedicated many years to the study of birds in the Sydney region and other parts of Australia.

Anyone living in this area will not have missed the melodious calls of the currawong early in the morning in concert or perhaps competition with the magpies. But their presence has far-reaching effects on smaller birds. Dr. Major's talk will enlighten us about these effects.

The event will take place at St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall at the corner of Vernon and Chisholm Streets, South Turramurra, at 8.00 pm. Bring your friends.

**Festival of Wildflowers** - The annual Festival of Wildflowers will be staged by Ku-ring-gai Council at the Wildflower Gardens on Saturday, 28th, and Sunday, 29th August, 1999.

This event has always been one of the highlights of the calendar for anyone interested in native flora and the wonderful display of wildflowers. STEP will be one of the community groups taking part in the festival, which will also feature guided walks through the gardens. The Australian Plants Society usually put on a grand display of cut flowers as well as offer native plants for sale. It should not be missed, and the kids will enjoy it too.

**Wilderness 2000** - That is the title of a presentation by the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, hosted by STEP. Recent forest negotiations have flagged twenty six key areas for detailed assessment, which all merit protection, and the Government is committed to their assessment by 2000. The presentation will introduce us to these forest wilderness areas and give an opportunity to discuss the issues associated with their preservation with the experts.

It will take place on Wednesday 15th September, 1999, at St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall, at the corner of Vernon and Chisholme Sts., at 8.00 pm. This is a unique opportunity to inform yourself about wilderness and get a handle on the debate.

**Cascade Bushwalk** - On Sunday 10th October, 1999, STEP will host a bushwalk along the Cascade trail in Garigal National Park. Bill Jones will lead the walk and will give us the benefit of his extensive and intimate knowledge of the bushland and the features in this area.

Put it into your diary now, but we will remind you again closer to the date.

**Ku-ring-gai Community Fair** - This will be held on Sunday 7th November, 1999, and with a bit of luck the weather will be kinder this year than it was last year. More information later.

## STEP Map

Work on the new map of the Lane Cove Valley walking tracks has advanced in great leaps since last newsletter.

The Land Information Centre in Bathurst has provided the street plan and contours, plus National Park boundaries, in digital format, and this has been incorporated into both map sheets.

The new edition shows the upper and the lower parts of the valley on opposite sides of the same sheet. Wet weather in May and June has slowed the field work of mapping the tracks in the lower part of the valley.



Nevertheless it is well advanced and we hope to have all the track information scanned in by late August. Spring and early summer will be occupied with editing and fine tuning the information.

In spite of the marvellous work by John Martyn and his team any hope

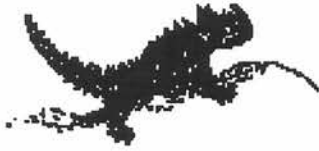
of completing the map before Christmas cannot be realised, but we hope to have the map ready to print early in the new year.

## Membership Renewals

At this time of year we are once again asking our members to renew their membership, and you will find reminder notices with this issue of the newsletter.

Your Committee hopes that the past year's program and activities have fulfilled your expectations, and that you have enjoyed the contents of the newsletter.

Your Committee would appreciate any feedback, critical or otherwise, to ensure member satisfaction.



### **STEP Committee**

At the Annual General Meeting in October there will be an opportunity to elect new Committee members. Your current Committee will be looking for candidates to fill at least two more positions on the committee (we are short of the number set in the constitution), but would be delighted if there were more candidates.

If you know of any likely candidates, or would like to join the Committee yourself please contact Michelle, Hugh, Helen, Jennifer or Neroli.

### **SUGARLOAF Walk**

May 2nd was a pleasant Sunday afternoon on which a group of about fifteen members and guests joined the STEP bushwalk at Sugarloaf Reserve.

Bill Jones took us from the carpark at the Field of Mars Reserve through the picnicers on the Buffalo Creek Reserve and down to the mangrove boardwalks of the new addition to the Lane Cove National Park.

The boardwalks are located among the mangroves to cause minimum disturbance to the flora.

Some parts of the route, especially North of the Sugarloaf access carpark have been badly invaded by weeds, but efforts are being made by regenerators to contain and roll back the invasion.

On the way via the mouths of Buffalo Creek and Kitty's Creek Bill regaled us with stories of the area's history and salient features, including a brief elucidation of the bloodwoods, the new genus of *Corymbia*. On the return to the carpark we all enjoyed the afternoon tea organised by Jennifer and Neroli.

### **NSW Planning and Assessment Act**

Recent changes to the Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979, pursued by Government to facilitate development in NSW, appear to have resulted in reduction of environment protection as well as in reduction of public participation. It has resulted in what developers might regard as positive steps, but which are regarded by people concerned with environmental conservation as negative and extremely damaging.

The 1997 amendments had removed community rights, elevated developer rights and failed to engage ESD principles.

Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) principles are part of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment reached in 1992, and as such are an objective, which should be paramount in any development planning legislation.

Currently there is a review of Section 3 of the Act, which deals with environment planning instruments (EPIs). These EPIs are a crucial element of the process, and the review presents the last opportunity to redress the negatives resulting from the previous amendments. Peak environment groups are attempting to persuade the NSW Government to restore the public participation rights and the environment protection.

Some of the issues to be addressed are:

\* Environmental Impact Statements should be prepared by



independent experts, not selected by or under the control of the development proponent,

\* Councils should be required to consider cumulative impacts and ESD when assessing applications,

\* Environmentally sensitive areas should be identified and should not be subject to "exempt development", (which does not require consent),

\* EPIs should be reviewed periodically in the light of local government State of the Environment reports,

\* EPIs should not be able to dispense with prior public consultation and environmental assessment provisions.

These few examples illustrate the reduction in the control of development contained in the 1997 amendments and the accompanying risk of environmental damage unless these issues are addressed.

There is an inherent danger that the community will not become aware of the negative impacts until it is too late.



### **Ku-ring-gai Council Planning Amendments**

On exhibition in local libraries until 13th August, 1999, are two documents prepared by Council in response to the State Government's changes to the Environment Planning and Assessment Act. They are

\* a draft Local Environment Plan (Amendment No. 180 to the Ku-ring-gai LEP) and

\* a draft Development Control Plan (No. 46).

Ku-ring-gai Council will seek to institute its own scheme, in place of a SEPP.

KMC proposes greater restrictions across Special Use and Open Space Zones for both "exempt" and "complying" development. For example development would not be "exempt" if:

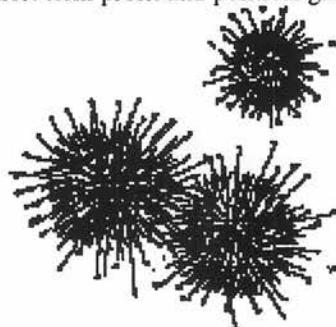
- \* it interfered with the amenity of the neighbourhood because of noise or fumes or other emissions
  - \* it would require a tree to be lopped without prior Council approval
  - \* the land concerned were heritage land, or Crown land reserved or dedicated for environment protection purposes, or critical habitat.
- "Complying" development would also be subject to additional restrictions, such as
- \* the development would need to be of the kind capable of being carried out with consent
  - \* the scheme would not apply to land identified in some other LEP as bushfire prone, or liable to flooding, or contaminated land, or land subject to subsidence, slip or erosion.
- These are sensible restrictions, but do not address some of the other problems mentioned above.



**Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998**

While the States are busy downgrading environment protection and public participation, the Commonwealth is busy devolving responsibility for environmental protection to the States. The Australian Conservation Foundation points out that while

the bill takes some positive steps, as modified by the cross benches, but it also provides many ways by which power can be handed over to the States, or responsibility can be sidestepped completely. They point out that the bill still does not consistently apply the principles of ESD across government as a whole nor does it contain mechanisms for public participation, monitoring, accountability or sanction. The handover of power to the States appears to be one of the most detrimental aspects, since the States have shown that environmental protection and ESD principles are frequently sacrificed on the altar of short term profit and political gain.



**Environmental Levy**

In May 1996 STEP wrote to Council advocating an environmental levy, following some discussion in Council (during a budget debate?), *"Ku-ring-gai has very extensive areas of bushland as a natural asset.....higher property values also bring expectations of better standard of civic facilities..... and... ..thereby fully absorb the ..... resources. This tends to leave Council short of the resources to deal with the environmental works, which are necessary to maintain our natural assets, and to pursue the many environmental initiatives, which the community, and indeed Council, perceives as desirable. ....the resources.....fall frustratingly short.....there is...strong commitment on the part of the community towards environmental objectives...(and) .....the time may have come to take an initiative of*

*this nature (environmental levy) to fund the many works, which currently languish or progress slowly because of lack of funding".* All good things take time to mature and STEP therefore welcomes the Council's recent initiative to seek State Government agreement to a 'special rate' for parks and bushland conservation. Council's "Parks and Bushland Conservation Strategy", which is currently on public exhibition, refers to the progressive decline of both the Urban Parks, where annual depreciation exceeds the capital replacement and maintenance serviceability, and the Bushland Reserves, where boundary pressures reduce the resilience and diversity, and available resources are inadequate to stem or rectify the decline. Our only concern is to ensure that an adequate share of the resulting funding will be directed towards the bushland reserves and the perimeter influences.

We urge members to read the document on exhibition and to support the scheme.

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**Grose Wilderness**

The March 1999 wilderness assessment, with the NPWS recommendation for protection of only 36500 of the 50000 hectares, leaves environment groups concerned that key areas remain under threat from encroachment by development, fourwheel drivers, litter and pollution. The main concerns relate to the head of the valley (under threat from a tourist resort proposal), the Blue Gum Forest area, and the Linden Creek catchment. If you know the area and share the concerns, contact the Colong Foundation for Wilderness (Keith on 9299 7341).



### Residential Strategy

The current state of play is: On 3rd June 1999, Council adopted a resolution to pursue exemption from SEPP 53 (ministerial determination of residential planning), and to carry out further studies and community consultation in order to arrive at an acceptable strategy.

On 4th June the Mayor and officers had a meeting with the Minister and DUAP officers to convey this intention, at which the Minister concurred with the plan, but insisted on a draft strategy to be submitted by end of March 2000.

Council has prepared four Briefs for consultants to undertake the following studies:

- \* Heritage - Visual Character Study
- \* Transport and Traffic Study
- \* Infrastructure Study
- \* Environmental Study.

These Briefs were on public exhibition until 6th July, 1999.

Consultants will be commissioned with a view to complete their reports later this year.

Council will be calling for nominations by residents/resident groups interested in participating in a resident reference group to provide community views in the preparation of the final strategy.



### NCC Draft Transport Policy

At a special conference in March 1999 the Nature Conservation Council of NSW has developed a draft policy for NSW and the metropolitan area of Sydney in particular.

With the evidence that our current transportation practices pollute our air, waterways and destroy natural

ecosystems there is little doubt that the growing dependence on cars is actually diminishing the benefits, which mobility should bring.

Urban dwellers are finding their freedom has been eroded. More and more are isolated in far outlying suburbs, devoid of amenities, and are unable to walk or cycle, play or relax in streets that should be the hub of community life.



To break this cycle, restore choices, improve health and lifestyles and restore social and economic interaction the policy envisages among other things:

#### \* Under Community Initiatives

- Community reviews of transport and trip reduction schemes,
- Oblige large employers to provide transport to the nearest public transport service,

#### \* Under Urban Planning

- Include accessibility to public transport and basic services in the approval process for new residential developments,
- Create a carfree CBD in Sydney and other congested urban areas,

- Encourage the development of higher population density close to shopping centres and public transport nodes,

#### \* Under Institutional Structures and Regulations

- Create a NSW Transport Commission, directly answerable to the Minister and responsible for all funding, transport system development, transport planning and policy issues,

- Use income tax regulations to benefit public transport users for work related

travel, instead of the currently opposite bias.

#### \* Under Public Transport

- Improve cross-regional public transport services,
- Gazette key public transport corridors at an early stage of planning,
- Develop modern and efficient bus-rail interchanges,
- Coordinate timetabling to ensure efficient and convenient modal integration,
- Introduce comprehensive time- and zone-based inter-modal ticketing,
- Provide fast and efficient public transport to Sydney's future airport.

#### \* Under Freight transport

- Upgrade rail lines to enable higher speeds and axleweights,
- Eliminate incompatibilities between State rail networks,
- Accurately determine the full cost of road freight and ensure this cost is fully paid,

#### \* Under Road Infrastructure

- Place a moratorium on freeway development in the Sydney metropolitan area,
- Cease funding which promotes newly constructed freeways.



### STEP Committee

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