



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 106 February 2001

HAPPY NEW YEAR

With the new year new challenges appear, some predictable, some not so. This year's major challenge seems to be another assault on our bushland by proposed road plans. Before Christmas nobody thought of it here, but apparently the storm clouds were gathering on the Central Coast, where unbeknown to Ku-ring-gai residents, a campaign was underway, supported by the media, to press the politicians in the marginal seats, both State and Federal, to expand road capacity leading to the Sydney CBD. It will need all the energy the local community can muster to avert such a disaster, but avert it we must, for our childrens' benefit and for the benefit of the larger Sydney metropolitan population. It will unfortunately occupy a lot of our time and means of communication, and we apologise in advance (*see article elsewhere in this newsletter*).

COMING EVENTS

Ways of Wildflowers- STEP will be hosting an address by well-known author, **Jocelyn Howell**, from the Royal Botanic Gardens, on "Ways of Wildflowers" on **Wednesday 28th February, 2001, at 8.00pm at St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall, cnr. Vernon St. and Chisholm St., South Turramurra.**

Jocelyn was co-author of '*Taken for Granted: The Bushland of Sydney and its Suburbs*', published in 1990, which has become a classic amongst Sydney bush enthusiasts.

Her latest book, co-authored with Doug Benson, entitled '*Sydney's Bushland: More Than Meets The Eye*' is a delightful and informative book, in full colour with 370 photographs of Sydney's beautiful bushland.

Her talk, illustrated with colour slides will be based on a section of the book, '*Bushland Ecology*', which is full of all sorts of fascinating information about Sydney's plants, their survival tactics and their relationship with wildlife, insects and even fungi.

Jocelyn will have signed copies of her book available on the evening.
(*see book review later in this newsletter*)

Autumn Walk - John Martyn will lead our autumn bushwalk along some of Sydney's foreshore at **Tambourine Bay, Hunters Hill, on Sunday 18th March, 2001.**

We will meet at Tambourine Park Reserve car park at **1.45pm for a 2.00pm start.** This is an area which STEP has not previously visited, except for mapping. It features mangroves, rock overhangs and attractive bushland scenery and we anticipate taking about 2 hours before returning to the car park for tea and biscuits.

"Journey to the Heart of Nature" - Late last year STEP assisted **Valerie Close** to attend a seminar and workshop in the United States run by a renowned environmental educator.

Val is anxious to communicate to STEP members the sense of excitement about environmental education which she derived from this workshop and has arranged an event at the **Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden on 29th July, 2001, starting at 2.00pm.** It will be structured to demonstrate the methods for environmental education by activities to awaken enthusiasm, focus attention, allow direct experience and to share inspiration. It will include a short walk through the gardens, a brief slide show from the workshop and conclude with a cup of tea. The nature of the presentation and the facilities imposes a limit of twenty attendees, and your early indication of interest would be appreciated. Contact Helen (9144 2703, or e-mail at p.helmore@unsw.edu.au)

STEP WEBSITE

STEP Inc. will have its new website up and running by March 2001.

Its address is www.step.org.au

The site will contain information about STEP (history, aims, achievements, details of projects such as the EPA Stormwater Trust grant for Fox Valley) and details of our talks & walks programme and publications as well as links to other interesting sites.

Map Launch

About one hundred STEP members, friends and interested people joined with us on 9th November last year to celebrate the publication of the new STEP map of the walking tracks of the Lane Cove Valley. Peter Duncan, Director of Centennial Park and Moore Park Trusts, was lavish in his praise as he formally launched the new map, referring to the wealth and accuracy of information displayed on the map which would enhance the enjoyment of the Lane Cove Valley bushland for anyone who used it. Copies were on sale on the spot and attracted a brisk trade.

The official speeches included a short address by the STEP president, Michelle Leishman, acknowledging the momentous input from John Martyn to provide the outstanding quality of information and presentation and without whose contribution it would not have been possible to bring this map to fruition.

In reply John highlighted the contributions made by the team of volunteers who helped to check the tracks on the ground and thanked them for their enthusiastic participation.

The occasion provided an opportunity for bushland conservationists to get together and exchange views and news and to see the new map on display.

Light refreshments were served before and after the official proceedings.

We express our special thanks to Mrs. Ann Maxworthy for the excellent catering, which was appreciated by all attendees.

During the speeches our long-standing member, Kik Lisser, unfortunately suffered a faint spell. However we are happy to report that he has fully recovered without any remaining ill effects, after a short stay in hospital for a check up.

Note: 800 maps have been sold to date.

Field Guide

The sales of the Field Guide To The Walking Tracks Of The Upper Lane Cove Valley have been going so well that our stock is down to a few dozen.

In the longer term it will be necessary to prepare a complete revision of the Guide, but that is a five year project. In the meantime the current edition still serves its basic objective of enhancing the appreciation of the valley's bushland.

Consequently the committee is exploring the options of a further print run, if cost increases can be contained.

Middle Harbour

The Middle Harbour catchment contains some marvellous bushland with numerous walking tracks for which there is currently no comprehensive map or guide. Consequently STEP is considering the possibility of preparing a map for that area.

STEP has initiated contact with all the conservation groups who are active in the Middle Harbour catchment to gauge support for such a project.

Initial liaison for scoping of digital data has also been taken up by John Martyn.

The concept is for a map of similar size to the new Lane Cove Valley map, double sided, with similar detail and information.

We will keep you informed if and as the project unfolds.

Clean-up Australia Day

This year STEP will set up a clean-up post at George Christie Oval, Yanilla Ave., Wahroonga.

It will be there between 9.00am and 3.00pm on Sunday, 4th March, 2001, under the guiding hand of Neroli Lock, and members living in

the area are encouraged to lend a hand to make it a successful exercise for the benefit of the community.

EPA Stormwater Grant

As reported in the November Newsletter as part of the President's Report, STEP was successful, in conjunction with Ku-ring-gai Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, in obtaining a grant from the Environment Protection Authority for work over a 12 month period to control the stormwater pollution and weed infestation occurring at Morona Ave., Wahroonga.

So far there has been no action on the site, with delays occurring due to staff changes at the NPWS, but our representative reports that Ku-ring-gai Council expect to prepare the engineering documents for construction work to commence in late March or early April. Updates and any news relating to the project will appear on the STEP website.

Mt. Pleasant Ave. SEPP 5

This proposal for a massive SEPP 5 development in an area of pristine bushland has been opposed by Council and referred to the Land and Environment Court by the proponent.

STEP's attitude has been that a better overall outcome could be achieved if other, already degraded portions of the proponent's land holdings were used, or if it must be on this site then to reduce the scale of the proposed development dramatically to conserve a much larger portion of the pristine bushland.

Consequently STEP has strongly supported Ku-ring-gai Council's efforts opposing the application in its present form.

Council's case has received a substantial setback through Commissioner Jensen's finding, at the Land and Environment Court,

against Council's contention that the site contained the endangered ecological community "Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest" (STIF). This adverse finding eliminates the need for a Species Impact Statement and clears an obstacle from the path of the development.

The next aspect, involving the existence and extent of "Sydney Blue Gum High Forest", will be heard in April.

Since both parties acknowledge the existence of the SBGHF community in a gully in the site's northwest, its relevance is restricted to the proximity of the development.

The only outstanding matter will then be the bushfire exposure, which affects the same interface as the SBGHF.

It seems that the development will eventually be allowed to proceed, the emphasis now being on the extent that the damage to the bushland can be minimised or mitigated. At this stage we would like to thank all those who have taken an interest and supported the battle against the destruction of this wonderful bushland.

Sydney Orbital

The term 'Orbital' was presumably dreamt up by the then DMR (now RTA) to lend some credibility to the plans to turn the Sydney metropolitan area into a magnificent showpiece of the motoring lobby's heaven-on-earth where 'free-flowing' traffic would allow the individual in his/her lounge-room-on-wheels to speed to any destination he/she chose without impediment.

At the time Americans were still projecting that dream with their freeways, tollways, turnpikes and parkways and their tank size 'autos', and Sydney planners were besotted with it.

Sensible traffic planning holds that major conurbations should be bypassed. This is normally achieved by means of ring roads or bypasses,

but that did not deliver the Sydney planners' objective.

So the 'Orbital' concept was born to describe two radial spokes feeding into the central business district, connected at the outside (western) end by a section of bypass road and on the CBD end by the harbour tunnel and the Eastern Distributor. The term orbital is geometrically correct since it describes a path which is similar to the orbit of a comet around the sun.

The DMR/RTA of course wanted it to be accepted as a ring road, and applied the principle that if you say something repeatedly over a long period of time, people will come to believe it.

Hence Sydneysiders have come to accept the 'Orbital' as something which it is not.

The only part which acts as a bypass is what is now proposed as the Western Sydney Orbital.

Since the concept was first mooted, the metropolitan area has spread beyond the location of this road corridor and it now goes through residential areas and remnant open space with all the attendant environmental problems.

In total the Sydney Orbital is a section of urban bypass constructed thirty years too late connected to three radial feeders (M2, M4, M5) which were constructed to allow the metropolitan area to become overly car dependent. This in turn has added to the urban sprawl and to the overload of traffic on most arterial roads in the metropolitan area. As a transport planning exercise it is a dismal failure.

What should have happened is that a national highway bypass of Sydney between the Hume Highway and the Pacific Highway should have been constructed three decades ago at the time the Hume Highway was being upgraded to dual carriageway. At that time it could have been developed without having to disturb residentially or environmentally sensitive areas.

Radial rail line feeders to the CBD and rail interconnections between

major satellite centres should have been developed to handle the journey to work travel demand, instead of the self defeating radial motorways. This history of car dominated transport planning has now presented us with problems which cannot be solved without major impacts on quality of life for the metropolitan population.

"Western Sydney Orbital"

The EIS for this proposed motorway is now on display for public comment.

The proposal is strongly supported by the Western Sydney Regional Councils as a way of getting heavy transport through-traffic off the local roads.

STEP is too far removed from the route to be able to comment on the impact on the natural environment. STEP will take part in the debate about a possible link between the F3 and the M2, a \$1 million study for which was announced by the Federal Minister for Transport, Mr. J. Anderson, at the same time as the Western Sydney Orbital EIS was announced.

Ku-ring-gai Council is quite rightly considering the impact the Western Sydney Orbital proposal may have on roads in Ku-ring-gai through increased traffic.

Council has reportedly also taken steps to obtain assurances from the Federal and State Governments that the B2/B3 corridor would not play any part in the proposal to create a link between the M2 section of the 'Orbital' to the F3.

Council has been opposed to the B2/B3 route or any other route affecting the environmentally sensitive Lane Cove River Valley or the Fox Valley since the early 1990s and welcomed its formal abandonment by the then Minister for Transport, Mr. M. Knight, in 1996. STEP urges Council to continue this opposition in its submissions to the proposed study for an F3/M2 link which is to be carried out over the next 12 months.

STEP must be ready to confront the issues raised by the Federal Government's announcement, and this will require some resources to be committed. We are now seeking donations to the STEP Environment Protection Fund from all interested parties which would support this commitment. Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible. The Committee is planning to engage a project/research officer to assess the implications of the proposals and formulate STEP's response. (Details in the next newsletter) We would appreciate members' comments about this issue.

Demand for Road Space

Demand for road space arises from a number of transport functions and it is useful to look at these functions separately in order to assess their importance in the debate about motorways.

The five that come to mind most immediately are:

- * Long distance goods transport
- * Metropolitan goods distribution
- * Journey to work
- * Dropping children off at school
- * Recreational

The functions which affect **economic efficiency** are the first two, i.e. **transport and distribution of goods**.

The function which causes most problems and which in effect determines the road capacity is the **journey to work** through its morning and afternoon peak demand. It is also the function which is most easily addressed through public transport alternatives.

Dropping the children off at **school**

has increased tremendously due to the growth of the private school sector.

The **recreational** function cannot be ignored but could generally be accommodated except that it tends to coincide with peak hour journey to work demands before and after a holiday period or weekend.

The long distance transport of goods requires bypassing of urban areas for greatest efficiency.

The **distribution of goods** in the metropolitan area requires good arterial roads and this is always used by the road lobby as a reason to construct radial feeder roads centred on the CBD.

Currently this requirement is **difficult to separate from the commuter demand** for journey to work. The only effective way to prevent commuter demand from swamping roads, to the detriment of goods distribution, would be to penalise commuter use with high tolls (not applied to goods vehicles). This appears politically impossible at the moment, but may come into play in future (see Singapore). The **journey to work** function does require some car travel, but a large reduction of volume **could be achieved through alternative travel modes**.

For the alternative modes to be attractive and therefore taken up by commuters requires the cost of car use to be increased considerably, and for the alternatives to be less costly, conveniently accessed and conveniently frequent. It also requires reasonable comfort and security.

To achieve these objectives implies a massive transfer of capital from roads to public transport and a considerable time to implement this. But there is good reason to impose a user pays principle on all motorways at peak hours. And the user should pay for the total cost of car use, including all the externalities which are currently not brought to book to the car user's account. Provided this is collected by the State (not by the private toll

operator as a superprofit) it could be used to enhance and support a public transport system.

A rail based public transport system cannot satisfy all commuter demand because of gaps in the system, but it **can have a major effect on road space demand, on pollution and on energy efficiency of transport**.

That is where infrastructure investment should be directed, not to more motorways.

'Sydney's Bushland -- More than meets the eye'

by Jocelyn Howell and Douglas Benson, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, 2000. Soft cover, 128 pp \$27-95.

This is a delightful and informative book, published in full colour with 370 photos. It is divided into three sections. The first, *A Closer Look at Sydney's Bushland*, describes in simple terms how geology and climate have shaped the landscape and its vegetation and describes the different vegetation types from rainforest to woodlands, heath and estuaries.

The second section, *Bushland Ecology*, is full of all sorts of interesting information about Sydney's plants, their survival tactics and their relationships with wildlife, insects and fungi.

The third section, *Out and About in Sydney's Bushland*, describes places where Sydney's bushland can be experienced in a morning, a day or even a bit longer. The book is in very easy to read non-technical style and will be an invaluable source of information and enjoyment for Sydneysiders and their visitors who are interested in our beautiful bushland.

It is available at Royal Botanic Gardens Shops or good book stores. Telephone orders are welcomed on 9231 8125.