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STEP Talk – Tuesday 10 September – What do Tsunamis and a Harley Davidson have in Common?

8 pm - St Andrews Church Hall, corner Chisholm Street and Vernon Street, Turrumurra

Dr Catherine Chagué-Goff, Research Fellow at UNSW and Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

Much of Catherine's research focuses on palaeoenvironmental changes caused by storms and tsunamis. Her talk will describe some interesting discoveries about past tsunamis and experiences of wave strength and travel. Come to the talk to find out about the Harley Davidson's journey.

STEP Lecture – Monday 21 October – Understanding the Science of Climate Change

8 pm - St Andrews Church, corner Chisholm Street and Vernon Street, Turrumurra, following the AGM to be held at 7.45 pm (see page 2 for details about the AGM)

The third annual STEP lecture will be presented by Professor Andy Pitman, Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate System Science, based at the University of NSW.

The Centre of Excellence for Climate System Science was established in 2011. The Centre is an international research consortium of five Australian universities and a suite of outstanding national and international partner organisations.

Climate system science is the quantitative study of the climate system designed to enable modeling of the future of the climate system. It is built on a core of the sciences of the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and land surface. Climate system science builds mathematical models of these systems based on observations. It describes these observations, and the underlying physics of the system, in computer codes. These computer codes are known as a 'climate model' and utilise very large super computers.

Professor Pitman's lecture will cover:

- the research methods and current understanding of climate science;
- the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions, concentrations in the atmosphere and climate change; and
- the implications for the Sydney region and Australia in general.



Bushcare's Major Day Out – Sunday 8 September, 9 am to 12 pm

Bushcare's Major Day Out is a national day designed to encourage us all to take part in the restoration and maintenance of our remaining bushland. Bushcare is not just about caring for the bush, it's about making friends and connecting with your community.

The day is specifically designed to give us the opportunity to find out what is being done in our own neighbourhood. It's a fun day where all members of the family can work alongside and learn from experts and experienced volunteers. There is a range of activities depending on the location, such as walks, planting, weed removal, photography workshops as well as native plant identification and much celebrated morning teas.

Just as Clean Up Australia Day has made us a litter conscious nation, Bushcare's Major Day Out aims to make us conscious of the need to protect our bush while learning about the role we can all play in its continued care.

To find out about a location near you or register interest email info@bushcaresmajordayout.org or look for Bushcare's Major Day Out on Facebook. There are several locations in the Ku-ring-gai, Hornsby and Ryde Council areas.

STEP Walk – Sunday 20 October – Allenby Park, Allambie Heights

Activity: An interesting short loop walk. Although Allenby Park is only 40 ha in size, the steep sandstone landscape dissected by two main watercourses ensures high biodiversity and some unusual vegetation. The Forest Oak Forest and the rainforest both have regional significance.

Grade: Medium. Total elevation change 70 m, including around 500 m of rough, poorly defined tracks and trackless walking. Walking boots advisable.

When: 9.30 am start, approx 3 hours duration.

Where: Meet at the Sydney Water entrance between the junctions of Kokoda Crescent and Owen Stanley Avenue, Allambie Heights.

Contact: Andrew Little 9924 7212 (after 7.30 pm) or aalittle@optusnet.com.au.

Annual General Meeting – Monday 21 October – Committee Positions Vacant

STEP's AGM will be held at 7.45 pm at St Andrews Church, corner of Chisholm and Vernon Streets, Turramurra and will be followed by the annual STEP lecture (see page 1 for details). Nominations for office bearers and committee members should be made in writing and received by the secretary at least 7 days prior to the meeting. Nomination forms are available from secretary@step.org.au.

We Need a New Treasurer

Steve Procter, who has done an excellent job of managing our finances over the past three years, has advised that he will not be continuing next year. We therefore need a new treasurer.

Duties are normal for a small volunteer organisation – be the 'money' person. Manage banking by depositing money received and arranging payments. Ensure surplus funds are placed on term deposit. Do basic record keeping.

It is vital to be an active committee member to ensure understanding of STEP's affairs.

Receipts – many come in by electronic funds transfer (about 10 per month). The secretary forwards relevant emails and manages member subscriptions, publication sales and receipting and sends cheques (about 6 per month) to the treasurer for banking.

Payments are generally made by eft – about 5 per month. All payments are approved by the committee.

The Environment Protection Fund is registered as a deductible gift recipient fund under Commonwealth Environment legislation so it can issue receipts for tax deductibility. An annual return is required. Having this fund means that STEP must be audited.

Whatever Happened to the Bushland Shire?

According to Wikipedia:

Hornsby calls itself the 'Bushland Shire'. This is in reference to its location on a high ridge separating two expansive areas of natural bushland: [Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park](#) on the eastern side and the [Berowra Valley Regional Park](#) on the western side. These provide large areas of natural parkland that form a [green belt](#) running from Sydney at the south to the [Hawkesbury River](#) at the Shire's northern end.

But no more! The Council's signs and promotional materials have been changed to the boring simple Hornsby Shire. We understand the change was made in response to a suggestion from a focus group, hardly a representative sample of the residents' views.

Status of the NSW Planning Legislation

It is expected that the Planning Bill 2013 will be presented to Parliament in September despite serious concerns expressed by expert bodies such as the Independent Commission against Corruption and the Heritage Council. The Law Society of NSW has warned that key provisions of the Bill may be subject to constitutional challenge; particularly those that seek to prevent appeals against unlawful decisions.

The Director General of the Planning Department has admitted in a letter to the Better Planning Network that the draft bill has gone further than the government intended and staff may have spread 'inaccurate or misleading information' during the consultation period about the impact on the public's rights. Opponents of the legislation are calling for the Bill to be redrafted.

STEP's submission is up on our website. Submissions from several peak bodies are on <http://betterplanningnetwork.good.do>.

The Federal Election – How the Coalition and ALP Environment Policies Compare

The Nature Conservation Council has prepared a summary comparing the environment policies of the Coalition, Labor Party and the Greens. Full details can be found on www.nccnsw.org.au. We provide a short summary of the major points of difference between the Coalition and the Australian Labor Party below.

Given the strong likelihood that the Coalition will win the election on 7 September, STEP has serious concerns about the future for our environment. The Coalition has no long-term vision to address pressures arising from Australia's high population growth and climate change, nor to improve our existing record of poor action on environmental degradation.

Issue	Coalition	Labor
Climate Change	<p>Committed to reduce emissions by 5% from 2000 levels by 2020. They will scrap the carbon tax and emissions trading scheme and implement a Direct Action Plan to pay, through a tender process, for projects designed to reduce emissions below 'business as usual' levels. It is not clear how business as usual will be defined or whether any penalty will apply to emitters that increase their emissions or fail to meet the Direct Action reductions. They will support exploration of soil carbon technologies but their ability to provide significant long term abatement and the quoted cost has been questioned by scientists.</p> <p>Without a price on carbon it will be very difficult for the Coalition to make further reductions if global agreement is reached on reductions in emissions aimed to achieve realistic controls on climate change.</p>	<p>Committed to 5–25% reduction on 2000 levels by 2020 in accordance with global agreement and 80% reduction by 2050. The central method of reducing emissions will be the emissions trading scheme from 2014, following the application of the current fixed price through the carbon tax. Emissions trading will be linked to the European market to allow purchase of cheaper permits from overseas.</p> <p>Other measures include the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to leverage private finance for renewable energy projects.</p>

Issue	Coalition	Labor
Renewable Energy	<p>Supports the fixed target of 41,000 GWh renewable energy by 2020. However continuing support for the RET is in doubt since Tony Abbott stated they will review it citing concerns about power prices.</p> <p>Commitments have been made to provide rebates totalling \$100 million pa for solar roof panels.</p>	<p>Continues to support the Renewable Energy Target and has accepted the Climate Change Authority's recommendation that the RET be reviewed every 4 years.</p>
Fossil Fuel Subsidies	<p>Has shown no sign of reducing the major subsidies such as the diesel fuel tax rebate, accelerated depreciation for oil and gas and aviation fuel tax concessions. The abolition of the carbon tax will remove some industry assistance but the climate change measures will effectively increase subsidies.</p>	<p>No commitment to cut the \$10 billion pa of subsidies currently provided to the fossil fuel industry. Indirect cut through toughening the rules around FBT concessions on company cars.</p>
Transport	<p>Will cut federal urban rail funding and support road funding instead.</p>	<p>Has supported public transport investment with \$9 billion since 2007. Has commissioned studies into high speed rail from Brisbane to Melbourne but no commitment to start the project.</p>
Marine	<p>Will review the new marine parks. Has promised a Great Barrier Reef 2050 strategy that will include a plan to improve water quality.</p>	<p>Introduced world's largest marine parks network and supports ongoing protection.</p>
Rivers	<p>Want to limit water buybacks under Murray Darling Basin Plan. Has suggested building up to 100 dams.</p>	<p>Support Murray Darling Basin Plan but the commitment to return 3,200 GL of water to the system is inadequate according to scientific opinion.</p>
Environment Laws	<p>Will weaken national environment protection law by relinquishing the Commonwealth's power of final approval over decisions to the states.</p> <p>Voted against increased regulation of coal seam extraction and coal mines and their impact on groundwater.</p> <p>Will remove recent extensions to Tasmania's forest World Heritage areas and may not support the Forestry Agreement.</p>	<p>Support retaining approval powers under the EPBC Act in Commonwealth hands but will increase the states' role in assessment.</p> <p>Strengthened to the EPBC Act to increase regulation of coal seam gas and mines and their impact on groundwater.</p> <p>Signed up to Tasmanian Forestry Agreement which protects 400,000 ha from logging and commits federal funds to restructure the industry</p>
Biodiversity	<p>Will scrap \$1 billion Biodiversity Fund and replace with \$300 million Green Army using a grant-based system working with bushcare groups.</p>	<p>Reduced \$1 billion Biodiversity Fund to \$600 million over 5 years. The funding is for projects that restore the carbon-carrying capacity of the landscape.</p>
National Parks	<p>Would surrender all federal powers to protect national parks to the states under their 'green tape' proposal. Some MPs have moved to allow grazing in national parks.</p>	<p>Federal protection under the EPBC Act has been retained but the state laws provide the main protection powers.</p>

Culling of Recreational Hunting in National Parks and State Forests

The NSW Government decided to review the governance of the Game Council in February following several incidents such as the charging of employees with illegal hunting activities. The review was carried out by Steve Dunn, former director-general of NSW Fisheries.

The report, released early in July, found that the Game Council had achieved 'significant results towards achieving its objects and functions' of promoting responsible and orderly hunting of game and pest animals. However it had unacceptable governance deficiencies. The report includes several condemnatory statements, such as:

The Game Council has not been able to resolve the inherent conflict of interest associated with its functions to both represent the interests of hunters, and to regulate their activities.

Allowing the Game Council to continue its current path is not an option. To be brutally honest this is probably as close as we ever want to get in Australia to what has started to look increasingly like a private regulatory agency, i.e. a regulatory and compliance function, under the control of a small group of individuals, partially cloaked from mainstream government oversight.

The response of the NSW Government was swift. It decided to disband the Game Council and substantially revise the so-called Supplementary Pest Control Program in national parks. In addition, hunting in state forests and two crown land areas was suspended pending establishment of a new regulatory system.

Briefly the regulatory proposals are:

- to transfer the regulatory, enforcement, education, policy and licencing functions to the Department of Primary Industries; and
- to establish an advisory Game Board that will undertake stakeholder engagement and representation, advocate hunting, advise on research priorities and commissioning research, and provide independent advice to government.

A volunteer hunting program is to be trialled in 12 national parks from October but it is substantially different to the original plan. In particular:

- all recreational hunters in national parks will be completely supervised by NPWS staff;
- there will be no use of bows and arrows, pistols or black powder weapons;
- minors will not be allowed to participate;
- pest control activities will be announced four weeks in advance and parks will be closed when hunting programs are taking place; and
- the training of volunteer hunters must be the same as that of NPWS staff with regular competency testing.

After the trial, hunting may be extended to the 75 parks previously identified as hunting locations.

The press release from the National Parks Association No Hunting Campaign summed up the decision as follows:

The announcement on 4 July 2013 tells us that the NSW Government has responded to community concerns, ensuring the unpopular, unsafe and costly program proposed by the Shooters and Fishers Party did not get off the ground.

Thanks to a concerted campaign by several community groups and individuals, such as STEP members, the NSW Government was placed under severe pressure to abandon this risky proposal that had no proven record of success in reducing the explosion in numbers of feral animals in national parks.

Action Still Required

The Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 and National Parks Act still have to be amended in order to implement the announced changes.

There has been no statement of funding for the new program. The budget for the Game Council was increased by 60% in the 2013 State Budget. In addition the Government previously announced that an extra \$19.1 million would be made available over 5 years to manage the risks of the original proposals, to be shared between the police, Game Council and NPWS.

It is to be hoped that these additional funds will now be applied to research into improved techniques and professional pest control programs that are so badly needed. More comprehensive baseline data is needed to enable better assessment of the effectiveness of the control programs.

We also hope that the same controls on hunting to be applied in national parks will be introduced into state forests.

People's Parliament Debate

Thanks to all the work on the ground by individuals and organisations to get petitions opposing hunting in national parks physically signed, the National Parks Association was able to present over 11,500 signatures to the NSW Government.

Alex Greenwich, Member for Sydney tabled these signatures so that the issue qualified to be debated under the People's Parliament legislation. This happened on 22 August. Two politicians from either side, including Alex Greenwich, debated the matter for 25 minutes.

More details can be found on <http://nohunting.wildwalks.com>.

Water Smart Program in Ku-ring-gai

This article has been contributed by Sophia Findlay, Water and Catchments Program Leader, Ku-ring-gai Council. Sophia's talk to STEP members on 6 August described the extensive water management work required by Council. A copy of her presentation is on the STEP website.

Urban stormwater run-off is a key environmental issue for Ku-ring-gai and in response Council has been proactive in providing leading water management solutions.

Solutions have focussed on adopting an integrated water cycle management approach, utilising water sensitive urban design (WSUD) to help mitigate the negative impacts that urbanisation has had on our waterways and bushland reserves.

WSUD includes approaches such as:

- the use of vegetated swales instead of gutters to filter pollutants and infiltrate run-off into groundwater;
- construction of filter gardens to remove pollutants from stormwater; and
- the implementation of rainwater and stormwater harvesting systems to help remove some of the excess peak flows caused by urbanisation.

Numerous examples of these approaches to stormwater management have been adopted across Ku-ring-gai in streetscapes and reserves.

To help apply WSUD options in a strategic manner, Council has progressively been undertaking sustainable water management studies on a number of sub-catchments. These studies look at the different options for stormwater runoff management and water re-use in each catchment, in order to achieve water use efficiencies and improvements to the health of local waterways and the surrounding bushland reserves.

One of the major findings from each of the catchment studies undertaken to date is that no matter how much stormwater harvesting or WSUD is undertaken on public land there is not enough space available to significantly mitigate the negative impacts that urbanisation has on the natural hydrology of a catchment. Also, with development mostly occurring on the ridges and the bushland reserves occupying the valleys, Ku-ring-gai's creeks tend to gradually improve in condition as you progress down the catchment. The further away you get from a direct urban stormwater input, the more diverse and healthy the ecology becomes.

As such, a key action to mitigate the impacts of stormwater run-off on our natural waterways and bushland reserves is to encourage the community to implement WSUD on their own properties, to provide additional benefits that can't be gained by projects constructed by Council alone.

To help engage the community directly to improve catchment health, Council's Water Smart Program has been developed and piloted in the sub-catchment north of Warrimoo Oval in St Ives Chase. This program delivers stormwater treatment systems on Council land and assists residents to install rainwater tanks or raingardens on their properties (in priority areas) through 'how to' workshops and a rebate scheme.

This area, part of the Ku-ring-gai Creek catchment, was targeted for the pilot as there was a clear opportunity to provide a significant increase in the length of Ku-ring-gai Creek that does not directly receive urban run-off (Figure 1). Also there was insufficient space at the bushland interface or in road reserves for Council to provide significant improvements alone.

Two Council projects were identified and implemented in the area (Figures 2, 3 and 4).

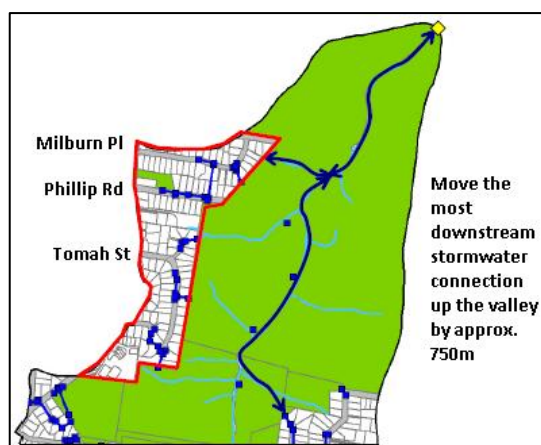


Figure 1. If the Warrimoo North Sub-catchment (outlined in red) stormwater flows could be disconnected from Ku-ring-gai Creek this may help the ecosystem condition improve up the valley



Figure 2. Milburn Place stormwater filter pipe



Figure 3. Phillip Road outlet stabilisation and treatment (during construction)



Figure 4. Phillip Road outlet stabilisation and treatment (complete and operating)

To date a total of 84 people have attended the workshops and there is an increasing level of interest in the rebates.

The Water Smart Program will be rolled out to other sub-catchment areas in line with Council's WSUD works program. The next area will be within the Gordon Creek catchment with workshop dates during October and November.

Free Workshops

Raingarden Design
6 to 9 pm, Tuesday 15 October

Raingarden Construction
10 am to 1 pm, Saturday 26 October

Rainwater Tanks
6 to 9 pm, Tuesday 12 November

Rainwater Tank Rebates

\$500 – a new rainwater tank connected to a significant area of roof

\$200 – to plumb an existing rainwater tank into another use (e.g. an indoor toilet or laundry)

\$200 – per additional internally plumbed water use, e.g. an indoor toilet or laundry

Raingarden Rebates

\$150/m² of raingarden, up to a maximum of 5% of the contributing hard surface catchment area

Find out More

Contact Jennifer Lee on 9424 0844 or visit www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/WaterSmart.

Stop Feeding the Weeds

This article was written by Dr Carol Booth, Invasive Species Council Policy Officer, and published in their blog, the Feral Herald. This blog has many fascinating articles about local and international issues relating to invasive plants, animals and pathogens. You may like to subscribe to this blog through the website <http://invasivesblog.com>.

The idea that nutrients are good is deeply embedded in society – driving the profitable vitamin-popping industry and the sale of fertilisers. But nutrients added to the environment can do great harm, including by promoting weed invasions.

Like most people, I haven't thought much about the destination of nutrients I excrete or discard but I've had to confront it recently while searching for an onsite waste treatment system for a property with very infertile soils surrounded by weeds that would welcome more nutrients. Unfortunately, the 'nutrients are good' mentality applies to waste water systems.

Most so-called 'environmentally friendly' waste treatment systems for unsewered properties promote nutrient-rich effluent as a benefit. 'A healthy ecosystem thrives on clean water, soil nutrients and minimal pollutants and

contamination,' says a company promoting a worm farm system that 'provides liquid fertilizer for your soil'. Advertising for an aerobic system trumpets it as 'environmentally friendly producing nutrient rich water'.

One in 20 Australian homes is not connected to a municipal sewage system and dispose of effluent on their property. This is an increasing trend as houses proliferate in the urban fringe and rural areas beyond the reach of reticulated sewage systems. It will undoubtedly exacerbate weed problems – many studies in different vegetation types show that increasing soil nutrients facilitates weed invasion.

Nutrient Problem

Sydney's bushland reserves on Hawkesbury sandstone soils are a botanical delight with more than 1500 native plant species. The sandstone soils are naturally very low in phosphorus, with concentrations on ridge tops and slopes ranging from 30 to 100 mg/kg, much less than the Australian average of about 300 mg/kg, which is much less than averages elsewhere, such as 650 mg/kg in the UK and 500 mg/kg in the US [1].

The future of the sandstone reserves depends on maintaining nutrient poverty. Sites receiving stormwater runoff have become very weedy – where soil phosphorus levels exceed 350 mg/kg, weed cover exceeds 80% [1]. Other sources of nutrients are dumped garden rubbish, septic tank effluent and sewage overflows.

Michelle Leishman and Vivien Thomson have found in glasshouse and field experiments that nutrients added to Hawkesbury sandstone soils diminish native plant survival and benefit weeds [2, 3]. The survival of most native plants tested (seedlings and 6 months old plants) declined as phosphorus levels increased, and under high phosphorus levels (typical of areas downslope of roads, 260 mg/kg) most plants died. Conversely, higher nutrient levels increased the survival and growth of exotic invaders compared to other plants.

Nutrient enrichment is thought to generally facilitate weed invasion by increasing the amount of unused resources and reducing competition from resident species for those resources [4]. The availability of resources (water, nutrients, light) can increase for many reasons – reduced use by resident vegetation (due to damage or destruction, e.g. from heavy grazing or disease) or additional resources (higher rainfall, fertilisation or more light from canopy removal). This means, say Mark Davis and colleagues, who have called it the 'fluctuating resource theory', that the invasibility of vegetation communities changes over time as the amount of unused resources fluctuates, and that weed invasions are likely to be episodic events [5]. It means that maintaining or restoring ecological health in many communities requires limiting nutrient additions and maintaining native species diversity to help ensure that available resources are comprehensively used.

Restoring Natural Nutrient Levels

Overcoming mechanisms that favour weeds above native species (weed persistence), and conversely re-establishing mechanisms that favour natives above weeds (ecological resistance), remain a foremost restoration challenge [6].

It's easy to add nutrients but not so easy to remove them. Carbon supplementation (added sugar) has successfully reduced soil nitrate concentrations (by stimulating growth of soil micro-organisms) and reduced weed abundance, but its effect is only temporary [7]. However, Suzanne Prober and Ian Lunt found that short-term sugar treatment or spring burning of a weed-infested temperate grassland (endangered grassy white box woodlands) allowed kangaroo grass to re-establish, which then reduced soil nitrates to natural levels. They concluded that kangaroo grass is 'a keystone species that regulates nitrate cycling, thereby imparting ecological resistance to invasion by nitrophilic annuals'. [8].

As well as striving to limit nutrient additions in the first place, it should be a high priority to investigate the potential of other native plants to sequester soil nutrients to restore low-nutrient resistance to weed invasion.



Kangaroo grass

References

- [1] Leishman M, Hughes M, Gore D (2004) Soil phosphorus enhancement below stormwater outlets in urban bushland: spatial and temporal changes and the relationship with invasive plants. *Australian Journal of Soil Research* 42:197–202.
- [2] Thomson V, Leishman M (2004) Survival of native plants of Hawkesbury Sandstone communities with additional nutrients: effect of plant age and habitat. *Australian Journal of Botany* 52:141–147.
- [3] Leishman M, Thomson V (2005) Experimental evidence for the effects of additional water, nutrients and physical disturbance on invasive plants in low fertility Hawkesbury Sandstone soils, Sydney, Australia. *Journal of Ecology* 93: 38–49.
- [4] Davis M, Grime J, Thompson K (2000) Fluctuating resources in plant communities: a general theory of invasibility. *Journal of Ecology* 88:528–534.

[5] Davis et al. (2000) identify the following testable predictions arising out of their theory that invasibility is related to fluctuating resource availability:

Environments subject to pronounced fluctuations, either by periodic enrichment or by release from the resident organisms, will be more susceptible to invasions than environments with more stable resource supply rates.

Environments will be more susceptible to invasion immediately following an abrupt increase in the rate of supply or decline in the rate of uptake of a limiting resource.

Invasibility will increase following disturbances, disease and pest outbreaks that increase resource availability

Invasibility will increase when there is a long interval between an increase in the supply of resources and the eventual capture or recapture of the resources by the resident vegetation.

[6] Prober S, Whiel G (2011) Resource heterogeneity and persistence of exotic annuals in long-ungrazed Mediterranean-climate woodlands. *Biological Invasions* 13:2009–2022.

[7] Prober S, Thiele K, Lunt I, Koen T (2005) Restoring ecological function in temperate grassy woodlands—manipulating soil nutrients, annual exotics and native perennial grasses through carbon supplements and spring burns. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 42:1073–1085.

[8] Prober S, Lunt I (2009) Restoration of *Themeda australis* swards suppresses soil nitrate and enhances ecological resistance to invasion by exotic annuals. *Biological Invasions* 11:171–181.

Letter to the Editor from Jim Wells – New Freeways Cure Congestion?

Thank you for publishing the thought provoking article on this topic in the July issue of the newsletter. The article was originally published in *The Conversation*.

I would like to present a sympathetic but somewhat different perspective on the matter.

Good roads are essential for the effective functioning of an urban area no matter how large or dense. Think what Sydney would be like if we didn't have the Harbour Bridge, freeways or the six lane main roads such as the Pacific Highway and Lane Cove Road.

Yes, improved roads do result in extra usage much as a new coffee shop in Wahroonga would result in an increase in the sales of coffee there. Whether the benefits outweigh the cost is a matter of opinion, hopefully one based on reasoned research.

A key factor is the need to move freight. How else do our groceries get delivered to the supermarket? How else does our rubbish get collected? How are our factories and warehouses to operate without road transport?

Yes, I can hear you shout – why can't the freight go by train? Let me share a fact with you. Every day several very long container trains proceed through Hornsby around lunchtime. These trains are mostly going to and from Brisbane. They don't start in Sydney; they start in Melbourne. One or two of them will do a little bit of dropping off and adding containers in Sydney; the rest only stop for crew changes.

The point is that almost all freight, Sydney to/from Melbourne and Brisbane, goes by road.

Yes, it would be nice if more could go by rail but this is unlikely in the short term. Canberra has no rail freight service at all.

The great bulk of freight on the roads of Sydney is local. Think of all the tip trucks, most with a dog trailer, that abound everywhere. No scope for rail here.

The article touches on congestion charging. This is well worth contemplating. However, it is not easy to do fairly and cheaply.

Professor Hensher of Sydney University's Institute of Transport and Logistics has supported a scheme whereby car owners would receive a rebate off annual registration fees based on odometer readings. Take your car to a licensed inspection station which could be a garage and get a credit in your bank account if you are a low distance driver. The system would be self-financing which means that base rego fees would increase to cover the cost of the rebates. He even has in contemplation the abolition of freeway tolls.

The proposal then goes on to suggest that cars should have a second odometer fitted which would record peak hour use only. Your rebate would then depend on when you drove, not just how far. One imagines an awful lot of people would be thinking of how these odometers could be tampered with. A further refinement would be to have cars fitted with a GPS device so that how much you pay depends on where you drive and the direction of travel. See http://sydney.edu.au/business/___data/assets/pdf_file/0008/173987/michielb-presentation.pdf.

Ahimsa Open Day

Ahimsa and its surrounding bushland in Cobram Road, Cheltenham, was the home of Marie Beuzeville Byles (1900–1979). Marie was a committed conservationist, the first practicing female solicitor in New South Wales, a mountaineer, explorer, bushwalker, feminist, author and foundation member of the Buddhist Society in NSW. Now owned by the National Trust, the bushland is open to the public, as is the Buddhist meditation sanctuary Hut of Happy Omens. The house is privately tenanted.

Following discussions in 2012, a number of people interested in the future of Ahimsa decided to organise an open day. The aim was to maintain public interest in the property and to communicate its story and values.

The open day was co-ordinated by Martin Fallding, with assistance from the Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust, National Trust of Australia (NSW) and a number of individuals. Martin grew up next to Ahimsa, and still owns the property there. He has a strong, lifelong connection to the property and former owner Marie Byles.



Marie Byles

Activities on the Day

- An urban bushland discussion forum, reviewed the past, present and future for urban bushland in the Lane Cove Valley and Sydney area.
- Opening by Deputy Mayor Cr Robert Browne, and talks by Ross Walker, Martin Fallding and Graeme Lyall. There were also reminiscences by people related to, or who knew, Marie Byles.
- The National Trust exhibition *Marie Byles: A Spirited Life*, was shown for the first time at Ahimsa in the Hut of Happy Omen. Historic Paddy Pallin bushwalking equipment from the 1940s was also on display.

- A bushwalk was conducted by the Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust, followed by afternoon tea.
- Children's bushwalk was conducted by Martin Fallding and the National Parks Association.
- A talk about Marie by Beecroft Historical Society member Lesley Goldberg.
- A showing of Gillian Coote's film about Marie Byles, with a short introduction by Gillian.

Review

About 120 people attended all or part of the day, including 70 or 80 on the bushwalk and 22 on the children's bushwalk in fine, warm weather. Around 12 people participated in the urban bushland discussion forum.

The large attendance demonstrated a high degree of interest, with many of the attendees having had a personal connection with Marie Byles or Ahimsa.

The informal forum discussed the past, present and future of urban bushland. It included presentations from Martin Fallding and Robin Buchanan.

Martin outlined the proposal for the Hills Community Bushland Area with which Marie Byles was closely involved in 1961, and the key role that the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists played in the making of State Planning Policy 19 — Urban Bushland in 1986. This presentation highlighted the importance of this planning instrument in improving the management of bushland by local government.

Robin outlined the evolution of bush regeneration practice in Sydney, the preparation of management plans for urban bushland and the important role played by various community groups in the Lane Cove Valley.

During the day, extensive informal discussion took place between attendees, particularly sharing of stories and experiences. In particular, the contemporary relevance of the interests of Marie Byles and the availability of information on her and the preparation of a biography was discussed. Attendees were primarily interested in Marie's adventures, conservation achievements and spiritual endeavours, rather than her role as a pioneering woman lawyer.

It was evident from the day that there is a surprising amount of interest in Marie Byles, her life, ideals, values and adventures and that these are relevant in a contemporary context. The Ahimsa property provides a focus for communicating stories relating to her life and her wide range of interests and causes. In today's world, Ahimsa continues to offer inspiration to people to explore and pursue the issues that inspired Marie Byles.

Follow-up Actions

Arising from the open day discussions, it would be desirable to follow up the following matters:

- *Documentation of the story of Marie Byles and Ahimsa* — No biography of Marie Byles has been published, although biographical information has been compiled by a number of people. Marie also wrote an unpublished autobiography which is in the State Library of NSW. This material, together with additional oral histories and documentation of the story and values of Ahimsa, could provide an important legacy to support the protection and interpretation of the property. It would be beneficial to seek interested partners to determine the scope.
- *Long term management of Ahimsa* — The future of Ahimsa is uncertain. It is important to ensure the sustainable use of the property and to initiate discussions with key stakeholders, including the National Trust,

Lane Cove National Park management and Hornsby Shire Council.

Options and proposals for making the property more accessible and relevant for contemporary usage should be considered. In 2017 it will be 80 years since Marie Byles purchased and protected the Ahimsa land at Cheltenham. This provides a good opportunity for completing a biographical project and for confirming long-term management planning.

- *Activities at Ahimsa* — Community engagement with the property by using the place as a way to tell the story in a contemporary meaningful way is important. Events such as open days, annual events (e.g. a 2014 oral history project) or a writer/artist in residence program could be considered.
- *Urban bushland discussions* — The informal discussion forum on urban bushland touched on the stories behind the evolution of the protection and management of bushland in the Lane Cove Valley, and how this may be relevant to the future of urban bushland, bush regeneration and ongoing development. In view of proposed legislative changes to the planning system it may be useful to convene a formal discussion on what is required to ensure ongoing support for protection and management of urban bushland.

STEP Information

STEP Matters

The editor of *STEP Matters* for this edition is Jill Green, who is responsible for all information and articles unless otherwise specifically credited. The STEP committee may not necessarily agree with all opinions carried in this newsletter, but we do welcome feedback and comments from our readers, be they STEP members or not.

All issues (from when we began in 1978) can be viewed online, usually with full-colour illustrations.

Feedback

Send complaints, praise, comments or letters to secretary@step.org.au. Please feel free to share your copy of the newsletter with friends, neighbours and business colleagues.

New Members

New members are always welcome to join STEP and to make themselves available for the committee should they wish to do so. The effectiveness of STEP is a factor of the numbers of members we have, so please encourage your like-minded friends and neighbours to join.

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