



STEP INC.

Community Based Environmental Conservation

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NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 1989

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A goodly number of people attended this function last month, to elect the new committee, meet new and familiar faces over a cuppa, and to hear Tein MacDonald speak on problems and successes with weeds in Ku-ring-gai. As well as the two short videos which were advertised, Tein brought a set of slides which those present found extremely interesting.

An impressive collection of weeds from Ku-ring-gai bushland was put on display by Yvonne Langshaw, and proved very informative.

The STEP committee includes two new faces: Judy Meacham and Bruno Krockenburger. We warmly welcome them to the committee and look forward to their contribution and assistance to the work of STEP.

Helen Petersen, a founding member of STEP, former President, and long-serving committee member, decided to not stand for re-election to the committee. With the Bradley sisters, Helen was foremost in pioneering bush regeneration in N.S.W. We thank her for her powerful influence on STEP and for the hard work and energy she gave to the community over the past 11 years.

Circulated to members with this newsletter is a copy of the President's Annual Report, the Treasurer's Annual Report, and a Question & Answer information sheet on the Lane Cove Valley freeway issue, prepared by John Burke for STEP members. We also include a list of STEP office bearers for 1989-90. Please contact any of them if you have any STEP matters to discuss or information to share.

WEED INVASION OF URBAN BUSHLAND

This topic has exercised STEP continuously since its formation. We believe we must now increase our efforts to improve the situation. It is easy to recognise the overt threat to bushland from the bulldozers and the concrete of freeways and other development. But the covert threat from creeping weed invasion, year by year, is perhaps harder to recognise. Yet it will destroy bushland just as effectively, if allowed.

Many of our bush reserves are being strangled by weeds. Pockets of weed are expanding to become ugly wastelands, bit by bit, year by year. For many years we have watched this degradation with disgust and mounting concern. With STEP and other volunteer bush regenerators, we attempt to stem the tide. But the little good we do is overtaken elsewhere by inexorable weed invasion, from gardens, sports ovals, bird-carried seed, fire breaks, and particularly from stormwater run-off. Most creeks are already choked with privet, lantana and other exotics. Where will it stop? As bushland is reduced so is native fauna, including our much-loved birds.

It seems the bush is condemned, especially the smaller bush reserves; that no one cares; that Rome burns whilst the authorities fiddle; that Ku-ring-gai in 10 or 20 years will have lost much of its unique character, its bush beauty, and hence some of its property value. This will hurt everyone, in aesthetic, financial and recreational terms. There is no doubt that if we wait much longer the damage will cost \$ millions (of ratepayers' money) to repair or, eventually, become irreversible. In that event, the wastelands would have to be cleared, as useless eyesores, and redeveloped; perhaps as lawns and gardens, whose maintenance is far costlier than bushland.

BEHIND THE SCENES. But people in the National Trust, in universities, in STEP, and in Ku-ring-gai Council, have been researching the problem. The science of bushland management (a mix of botany, engineering, chemistry, etc) has this decade grown up to provide some of the answers. It is now understood that stormwater run-off, which carries urban chemicals such as garden fertiliser and pets' droppings besides seeds, is largely the problem. It increases moisture and nutrient levels in the soil, discouraging or killing native plants and preparing the soil for weed invasion.

The bush CAN be saved. It can be protected from nutrient-laden seed-laden urban stormwater; it can be maintained and, where necessary, carefully regenerated. But at the cost of trained labour and capital expenditure. Ku-ring-gai Council has the responsibility and the money (OUR money) for this work. Without it, our urban bush is irretrievably doomed. Although part-time volunteer regeneration work is valuable it is not enough, nowhere near enough, alone.

Since 1981, Ku-ring-gai Council staff and people in the community (including 3 or 4 from the STEP committee) have got together in Council committees such as the Bushland Management Working Party and the Parks and Reserves Committee. They have made sensible recommendations to the Aldermen, who approve budget expenditure. But the Aldermen largely ignore the experts' advice, year after year.

Recently, a joint report ("Urban Bushland: Weeds", June 1989) by Council's Chief Engineer and the Manager of Parks and Landscape strongly supported the above committees. It recommended increased funds (\$285,000) for longterm weed control by:

- * community education/coordination,
- * engineering works to divert urban stormwater from bushland, and
- * increasing bush regenerators from 4 to 8 plus contract labour.

Again, most of the recommendations were ignored. But at least Council is increasing the number of bush regenerators from 4 to 7, at a cost of about \$70,000 per annum. This number is no more (including contract labour) than employed by other Councils which have less than half our bushland! See the Table below (extracted from the above report) for detailed comparisons. For example, Lane Cove Council has a twentieth of our bushland (60 hectares compared to our 1100 hectares) but spent the same amount (\$115,000) as Ku-ring-gai Council on weed control! Ku-ring-gai spends less \$ per hectare than other Councils, except Ryde!

Council has \$50 million budget annually, of OUR money. It spends (\$115,000 plus \$70,000) less than half of one percent of this on maintaining urban bushland. Of 110 field staff in the Parks section, only 7 are employed in bushland management. Council's recent Recreation Needs Study showed the Ku-ring-gai community's high use of bush for recreational purposes, such as walks, runs, and picnics. Ku-ring-gai prides itself on its leafy streets and beautiful bushland. Yet our present Council places a **LOWER PRIORITY ON BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT THAN OTHER COUNCILS.** It does this despite the recommendations of its own committees and senior staff.

6.3 By comparison, expenditure and staffing levels for weed control activities by other Council's as follows :-

Council	Bushland (Hectares)	Budget (1988)	Staff (1988)	\$ per hectare
Ku-ring-gai	1,100	115,000	4	104
Warringah	564	200,000	4 + contract	354
Lane Cove	80	115,000	5 + contract	1,916
Ryde	377	37,000	Contract	98
Bankstown	372	66,000	2	177
Woollahra	19	40,000	Contract	2,105
Mosman	93	60,000	Contract	645
Manly	255	42,000	2	164
Willoughby	217	101,000	3 full time	465
	(155)		2 part time	

This has to change. The experts' advice cannot be safely ignored any longer. The bushland cannot be allowed to degrade further. Who says so? We the ratepayers say so. The Aldermen will remain undecided on transferring funds from less urgent work (such as pruning roses) unless we - the ratepayers and electors - request it, loud and clear. Like other groups, who lobby for libraries, gardens, or sports facilities, we have a right to express our wishes: we must do so, for them to be heard and realised.

WHAT YOU CAN DO. We therefore ask each of you (one at least from each family) to write a short letter addressed to The Mayor (Alderman Lennon), Ku-ring-gai Council, Gordon 2072. A few polite lines will do. Simply request, in these or your own words, that more be done **URGENTLY** to conserve our urban bushland, and that more of Council's budget be allocated to bushland management.

As members of STEP, we know you want to help conserve urban bushland. We believe this is the most effective thing you can do. It will only take you two minutes but each letter carries great weight. Each letter to local or state government is estimated to represent the views of 100-200 residents. This is an important issue and a chance to do something for the environment, for yourself and future generations. STEP is your society. We - your committee - work hard for you. But this is one thing we cannot do for you. We need weight of numbers. We ask **EACH OF YOU** to write a letter at this crucial time.

If you want full impact, you should send a copy of your letter to each Alderman. To save you the copying and postage, we suggest you send your letter (preferably before 20 October) to the committee member below:

Ralph Pridmore, 8c Rothwell Rd, Turramurra 2074,

who will make copies for ALL the Aldermen and hand deliver them for you. This would also let us know the numbers and thus the likely impact on Council.

This Newsletter was compiled by Jenny Simons, Sue Jones, and Ralph Pridmore.

TREASURER'S ANNUAL REPORT 1989

STEP INC

Statement of Receipts and Payments for year ending 30/6/89

RECEIPTS	+	PAYMENTS	
MEMBERSHIP FEES	937	PETTY CASH	463
	+		
SALE OF BUSH REGEN BOOKS	12.1	DONATIONS	50
	+		
DONATIONS	72.66	PURCHASE OF BUSH BOOKS	55.4
	+		
SALE OF PLANS OF MANAGEMENT	120	PUBLIC RISK INSURANCE	300.15
	+		
LIFE MEMBERSHIPS	560	PRINTING MEMBERSHIP FORMS	620.16
	+		
MISCELLANEOUS/FREWAY PAPERS	30	MISCELLANEOUS	95
	+		
BANK INTEREST	12.66	SUBSCRIPTIONS	85
	+		
ROYAL BANK INTEREST	614.56	FID AND STATE DUTY	3.67
	+		
TOTAL	2358.98	TOTAL	1672.38
	+		
	+	SURPLUS RECEIPTS	686.6
	+		
	+		
	+		

FUNDS AS AT JUNE 88

BANK	1667.43	ROYAL BANK	3909.15
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FUNDS AS AT JUNE 89

BANK	1739.59	ROYAL BANK	4523.59
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TOTAL FUNDS AS AT JUNE 88 5576.58

TOTAL FUNDS AS AT JUNE 89 6263.18

SURPLUS 686.6