



STEP Inc

President's Report for the year to October 2006

My last Annual report as president was to the 15th AGM in 1993. In that report I was optimistic about STEP's ability to make a difference but saw continuing threats to our environment from the pressures of population. Little has changed.

Michelle Leishman

Michelle was elected president in 1997 and continued in that role until April this year when her academic workload and young family made it impractical for her to continue. As we noted in the May newsletter, Michelle has contributed greatly in both the president's leadership role and in raising our scientific credibility. Happily though, she continues as a committee member. She has made a tremendous contribution.

Committee

Your committee has been busy over the past year. Meetings were held every month except January with an average attendance of eight of the nine members. We are fortunate to have within the committee a good spread of scientific, activist, general ecological, financial and administrative skills. It is a hard working and effective committee.

Accounts

Because of its strong membership base and publishing activities STEP is in a very sound financial position. The audited accounts are available at this AGM. Committee member Jim Wells ensures that reliable accounts are available to the committee throughout the year and that issues of governance are correctly handled. Our accounts include the BGHF Group.

Grants

We see the education of school children in ecological matters as very important for the future of Australia. We have just awarded St Ives Park Primary School \$2,250 to assist with development of a bushland area at the school. This was paid from the Morse Fund that was set up from a bequest from Pam Morse.

We continue to support Young Scientist, a competition organised by the Science Teachers' Association of NSW. The winner of the \$200 STEP prize this year is Robbie Bishop-Taylor from year 10 at Great Lakes College, Forster for his project entitled *The Identification of Critical Salinity Thresholds for Upper Estuarine Plants*.

Member activities

In March Dr David Roots spoke on *Explosive Volcanoes and Diatremes in Japan, Kamchatka and the Sydney Basin*. In June Dr Ann Goth lectured on *Brush Turkeys, our Urban Wanderers*, and of course tonight we are hearing from Associate Professor Lesley Hughes on climate change.

Bushwalks were held at Deep Creek Reserve at Narrabeen Lake, The Royal National Park, Cumberland State Forest and Botany Bay National Park.

We are arranging a similar programme of walks and talks for 2007.

Blue Gum High Forest

To protect the largest and most bio-diverse remnant of the Blue Gum High Forest ecological community at St Ives, the BGHF Group has been working to protect all that remains in conservation reserves.

Last year, largely as a result of the efforts of the BGHF Group, the ecological community was listed as critically endangered. The NSW Scientific Committee has just made a preliminary determination to also list BGHF as critically endangered.

In July 100 Rosedale Road was gazetted as part of Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve. Now all that needs to be brought into public ownership is 102 Rosedale Road. To date, three quarters of a million dollars is promised toward purchase of the 0.5 hectare of Blue Gum High Forest at 102 Rosedale Road.

Very involved with the BGHF Group are STEP committee members Neroli Lock and Andrew Little and STEP member Nancy Pallin from whom I have stolen some of the above words.

Membership

STEP has over 450 members from over 60 postcodes. While Ku-ring-gai still holds the bulk of our members the number from adjacent areas continues to grow.

Amalgamation with TABS

A neighbouring environmental group, the Thornleigh Area Bushland Society, TABS, has approached us with a view to amalgamating. TABS has a problem common to so many community groups in that people are reluctant to join its committee. It does, however, have active

and interested people who have been very effective over a considerable number of years. A TABS AGM last week approved their committee's recommendation that TABS be dissolved and that its members be transferred to STEP. We shall give members more information in the November newsletter once arrangements are completed.

Newsletters

We published five newsletters during the year and assume that they are carefully read by all the members. We intend them to range widely over news and technical matters.

Submissions

There is always the need to comment on proposals before the community and STEP does this frequently on matters, such as plans of management, likely to affect our environment.

Advisory Committee

Committee member Neroli Lock continues to represent us on Ku-ring-gai Council's Bushland Catchments and Natural Areas Advisory Reference Group. This group, which is the latest stage in evolution from the original Bushland Management Working Party, has recently been reorganised and we are assessing its potential effectiveness in engaging with the community.

Publications

STEP, starting with the *Plan of Management for South Turrumurra Bushland* in 1980, has always published. Sales of our publications continue to be strong and brought in over \$12,700 in revenue during the year to 30 June 2006. Committee member John Martyn is nearing completion of a stunning 200 page photographic study of the nature of the Sydney area which we plan to publish in the first half of 2007.

Funding for the Lane Cove NP

Some six years ago sections of the valley managed by Hornsby Council were added to the National Park and the state government increased the funding of the NPWS by \$600,000 for the management of the additional land. STEP and our neighbouring Hornsby group TABS have wanted to ensure that that money is being received and spent as envisaged but so far we have been unable to receive a clear and unambiguous answer from the public service. We shall try and clear the matter up over the coming months.

Website

The STEP website is continually updated by committee member Tim Gastineau-Hills. We urge members to visit it. It is a powerful tool for communicating with members and for explaining

just what STEP does as well as being a resource.

Riparian and Closed Forest Areas

We are concerned that managers of bushland are not conscious enough of the effect of urbanisation on increased water runoff and the consequent modification of plant communities. Inappropriate fire regimes for hazard reduction are one consequence of this blind spot in management. Committee member Andrew Little is studying this issue and we shall be reporting to you on it from time to time.

The Year Ahead

I wrote about the role of an urban environmental group in the July newsletter and concluded that environmental challenges will be never ending. There will always be an important role for STEP.

Global warming is such an urgent issue that the governments of the world seem about to confront it and, just a week ago, the penny seems to have finally dropped for our federal government. This is great news but there is a long way to go and many debates to be had as the community looks for the best way forward.

One issue that we shall be exploring further is that of limits to growth. It is very disappointing to see one section of the city after another rise up in anger at the government planners' efforts at social engineering. For so long as we don't see the loss of something in Cronulla or Katoomba as being as bad as the loss of something closer to home then the politicians' policy of divide and conquer will be successful.

The intentions of the commercial community, so beautifully summarised recently by Harry Triguboff of Meriton, is to promote physical growth of our city without limit in order to feed the factories and keep shareholders happy. One percent population growth per annum will give us over 30 million people in Sydney in another 200 years and that will mean that urban bushland, and the heritage precincts that our friends at FOKE are concerned with, will be pretty much confined to the history books. If we are really an intelligent society surely we can discuss and decide our own future rather than have it shaped incrementally by sectional self-interested forces.

Finally

Thanks to our loyal members; without you STEP would not exist. We look forward to continuing to work for a better world.

John Burke
October 2006