

STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No.67, August 1994

COMING EVENTS

FOR THOSE INTERESTED SPECIFICALLY

Environment in Crisis — Conference organised by NCC at Sydney University (intended for environmental groups), Saturday 27/8/94.

FOR EVERYONE

Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden Festival of Flowers — Saturday 27/8/94 and Sunday 28/8/94. STEP will have its display there as usual. In the past it has been a great day among the wildflowers. It will be interesting to see the wildflower response to the January bushfires, which swept through the Garden. It should be spectacular.

STEP Spring Bushwalk — Sunday 4/9/94, at 2.00 pm. Meet at Canoon Rd. carpark. We plan to head for Deylin's Creek and Whale Rock. Call Judy Meacham 4492843 or John Martyn 4497962 to confirm meeting place.

Ku-ring-gai Community Fair — Sunday 18/9/94.

This fair has become a fixture at the Bicentenary Park, with lots of activities, foods and stalls. STEP will be there also, come and bring your family and friends and enjoy the day.

Talk by Dr. Alex Ritchie, preceded by a short AGM--- Thursday 13/10/94. Details in future.

FAUNA IN THE LANE COVE RIVER VALLEY

Could the Lane Cove River Valley ever again support the number and diversity of fauna, which it did when European settlement first occurred?

The answer is probably NO.

European settlement brought resource exploitation, ie logging, change of vegetation, extraction of sandstone and sand, and was then followed by the gradual encroachment of residential development.

The result is the current fragmentation, perimeter incursions, weed infestation, surface water pollution and feral animal invasion, which caused the elimination of a whole batch of vulnerable native species.

In many respects any hope of reversing this result is not realistic. However, this should not deter us

from wanting to know what was here 200 years ago. It has its difficulties, since such information is not readily available.

The STEP committee decided a year or so ago to look a bit more closely at the matter, and indeed to try and take it a little further as a long term project, with a view to establishing whether restoration was a possibility.

If viewed in absolute terms, of course, restoration is not possible, since that depends on a totality of restoration of all species of flora and fauna in exactly the same balance as it existed 200 years ago.



Any restoration would be an engineered, partial restoration with all the negatives that go with such a

contrived result. Nevertheless we have undertaken to investigate.

As a starting point we need to know what has survived and is still present in the valley, and how this matches the present habitat, food shelter and breeding conditions, and to establish how their survival can be assured.

Currently committee member Jennifer Schwarz is building up information on this aspect.

Beyond that she is also gathering information on what might have been there previously, and would be pleased to receive any anecdotal information and any pointers as to the source of recorded information.

The ongoing task would then be to ascertain the conditions necessary for their reintroduction. Cats, dogs, foxes and even rabbits all pose a threat to native wildlife, either by predation or by competition. These pets or feral animals prey on some species, eat the same food as others use the

same refuges for breeding or simple survival, and are capable of spreading diseases to the native species.

Therefore control of these animals is an absolute requirement before any reintroduction of currently non-resident species can be contemplated.

The current upsurge in interest in the natural bushland, due to the recent fires, has led to opportunities and efforts to rectify some of the pollution and weed infestation, and we would like to think that such interest could be extended to the plight of the native fauna.

We will be attempting to obtain some financial support, perhaps by a grant, to map the current situation of remnant wildlife and match this to the regenerating vegetation.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

This was the topic of Dr. Carolyn Pettigrew's talk at our June gathering.

With regret it must be reported that the attendance was extremely disappointing, and certainly did not do justice to the speaker or the subject.

Carolyn gave a very interesting overview of the Government's drive to reduce the total waste volume by 50% by the year 2000.

The NSW Waste Service also manages the clean-up of previous landfill sites and is starting to use the methane gas generated by the decaying waste for the purpose of power generation.

It was interesting to hear that wood, garden and food waste still constitute nearly 50% of waste being delivered to landfill. This has led to the effort by Waste Services to persuade local Government to encourage composting and further separation of materials such as steel cans.

Waste Service recently announced a trial recycling service for garden and wood waste in association with the Ryde Waste Management Centre at

Wicks Rd., North Ryde. They will accept for composting:

- *grass clipping
- *prunings
- *tree branches up to 2m and 200mm diameter
- *weeds
- *pallets and crates (flattened)
- *timber up to 2m length
- *fence palings.

NOT accepted will be:

- *painted, stained or treated timber
- *plastic, metal food scraps mixed in with the waste.

Carolyn's talk ended with a free-flowing discussion of the various aspects of the subject.

We thank Carolyn for her time, enthusiasm and informative presentation. We will all gain from the initiatives being taken, and it is worth our while supporting them.

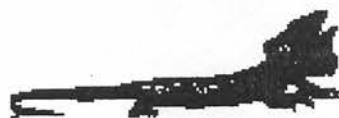


AIR POLLUTION AND MOTORWAY MADNESS

They are two sides of the same coin, but that does not seem to be recognised by the Authorities.

Even as an inquiry is being held into air pollution, plans for further increases of road space in the form of motorways are being promoted by the RTA.

And that is in addition to the M2, which has been roundly condemned by every expert and by the Woodward Commission of Inquiry, but is being ruthlessly pursued to its construction by the RTA and its Minister.



Why the Minister continues to lend support to further large scale road plans is hard to understand, when it must be obvious that they are beginning to be an electoral liability to his Government.

It is unfortunate that the official response to problems like the increasingly intolerable traffic on the Pacific Highway is to take further measures designed to make it easier to use the motor car to travel to work, rather than to make it safer for local residents and school-children, or to improve the frequency and convenience of rail transport.

Residents of Ku-ring-gai and other North Shore municipalities should take a stand against policies which inevitably turn their neighbourhoods into air-polluted, hazardous traffic sewers for peak hour traffic passing through from external origins to external destinations.

The greater good of the community is NOT being served by it, but it is merely a stubborn pursuit of failed transport policies.

CAT FACTS

The recently published Cat Facts contains some very succinct information about responsible cat ownership.

Cats make excellent pets and can come to be regarded as members of the family, for some elderly people very essential companions. It is often very difficult for the fond owner to accept that the same gentle creature can also become an extremely efficient killer of wildlife. We all know of how Moggy drags in a dead rat or mouse, and might even be proud that it is helping to keep pests under control. But we might find that the dead rat was really a juvenile ring-tail possum. The Cat Facts sheet starts from the view that it is quite possible to have a cat without allowing it to cause environmental havoc.

It points out that responsible ownership benefits the owner, the cat and the wildlife.

And the crucial matter is to prevent it from straying. A cat which is allowed to roam is exposed to disease, accident, fight injuries and can cause neighbourhood disputes. To keep the cat confined therefore has tangible benefits all round, and it does not need to impose any cruelty or discomfort on the cat providing the enclosure gives adequate shelter and food and drink are available.

The important aspects are to desex the cat and to provide a suitable enclosure, inside the house or externally.

This message cannot be overemphasised and it would not be out of place to teach schoolchildren the responsible ways to own and manage a cat.

GREEN ECONOMICS

In the September 93 issue of the Newsletter (No. 63) we talked about "Green" Economics in the context of the Greens Senators effect on the Federal Budget process.

About the inconsistencies between environment policy words and Government actions, and the resulting pressures on the environment in Ku-ring-gai due to flawed population policies.

Similar conflicts occur in other respects, which impact on Ku-ring-gai, for instance transport.

The modern economy has brought about a pattern of resource use in the production process, which is based on the "market" cost of the inputs.

Very logical and very efficient!

This frequently results in the raw materials, or whatever, being transported long distances to the point of use.

This would also be rational, if the true cost of such transport were reflected by the "market", and if this extensive transport was not

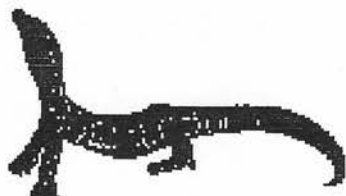
detrimental to the need for greenhouse gas reduction.

To bring this into the local context, the transport pressures, resulting from incorrect "market" pricing and lack of rail transport alternatives, are causing havoc in North Shore suburbs, which were previously "residential", and are now rapidly becoming "transport sewers".

If environmental policies were being applied consistently by State and Federal Governments the cost profile of inputs would change to reflect the true cost of energy, pollution and other externalities like health effects.

This would dramatically reduce the transport demand, especially long distance road transport and the use of passenger cars in peak hours with one occupant.

It sounds simple, logical and even obvious, if there was political will to recognise it. And that's the rub. Since politicians like to lead from behind, we, the community, may not be pointing the way clearly enough to allow our politicians to lead us that way.



GREEN ACCOUNTING

The contrary nature of National Accounts is drawing some overdue attention, here and elsewhere. In the local context, natural bushland is valued lower than if it is destroyed for some other purpose, as long as that purpose can be labelled development.

Development adds to the GNP, even if it uses up or destroys irreplaceable resources, the loss of which is not entered on the other side of the ledger. To make things worse, if the development resulted in pollution, the latter is not entered as a negative, but the costs of corrective action to counteract, mitigate or

repair the damage are added to the GNP.

Consequently, a country can dig its own grave and fall into it, metaphorically, and still give the appearance of making "progress". They are working on it, which is a start, but one suspects that plenty of obstacles will be placed in the way of that sort of sensible reform.

STEP COMMITTEE

STEP has over the years demonstrated an attraction to draw dedicated and talented people into its committee. As longer-serving members retire, others have STEPped, pardon the pun, into the breach. The resulting combination of continuity and renewal has been very effective, and arguably one of STEP's strengths.

Every year in October the opportunity arises at the Annual General Meeting for new appointments, and this year is no exception.

There is always opportunity for STEP members to become more active, either on the committee or in the pursuit of specific projects. The current committee would be delighted to hear from you.

Almost any skills can be put to good use in STEP's activities, and sometimes activities can be initiated which fit a particular member's skills as well as STEP's aims and objectives.

But please rest assured, nobody will be press-ganged, arm-twisted or otherwise co-erced to join the committee at the AGM.

So you can safely come along to the next one in October, praise or criticise the committee, air your views and listen to an interesting speaker. We promise you that!



BOOK REVIEW "EARTH IN THE BALANCE" by Al Gore, currently Vice-President of the United States of America, is remarkable in so far that it was written by such a politically prominent person. It could be expected to be a repackaging of a comfortably conservative approach to a topic which has received a lot of public attention. Surprisingly it is not that. It is a frank look at the environmental problems of the world today, and it looks at the ethical and philosophical issues, which arise.

It is also about economics and technology, and it dares to lead the way with some remarkable insights.

Gore talks about a new **organising principle**, which needs to be embraced at a time when there is general recognition that world environment is in grave danger. He calls on this common perception to unite people of the world in a common purpose, that of an all-out effort to bring every policy, every institution, every treaty and alliance,...to bear..." in short, every means to halt the destruction of the environment and to preserve and nurture our ecological system" ..

He condemns the minor adjustments, marginal changes, moderate improvements etc as being forms of appeasement, designed by politicians to try to "satisfy the public's desire to believe that sacrifice, struggle and a wrenching transformation of society will not be necessary"

It's an Earthscan paperback, available in the library or shops, and worth reading.

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TAIL ENDER

Have you seen the quote: "...O pardon me thou bleeding piece of earth that I am meek and gentle with these butchers.." being used by The Wilderness Society to draw attention to the destruction caused by clearfelling of forests? Shakespeare wrote it for Hamlet to speak, in a slightly different context, but the TWS application of it seems very fitting. No doubt it could be applied in many instances, where mindless destruction or indeed purposeful vandalism are manifest. But on the other hand we need to be more decisive than Hamlet, if we want to ensure the conservation of our environment.