



STEP Matters

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Diary Dates

25 Aug	Wildflower walk (see next column)
21 Sept	Opening of Terrys Creek Walking Track (see page 3)
29 Sept	Wild river walk (see next column)
7 Oct	AGM and talk on birds in our backyards
15 Dec	Christmas barbecue

Wildflower Walk

Date: Sunday 25 August

Time: 1 pm

Meet: Bulara Street, Duffys
Forest (near Terrey Hills
Golf and Country Club)

Come and enjoy the wildflowers as we walk along the Cowan Track to a scenic lookout above Cowan Creek and Apple Tree Bay. The track is fairly level and the walk will take about four hours. Remember to bring drinking water, something to eat and your binoculars.

In the event of rain contact
Neroli Lock (9489 5794).

Wild River Walk

Date: Sunday 29 September

Time: 10 am

Meet: Acron Oval car park, St Ives
where we will organise cars
at both ends of the walk

We will explore Middle Harbour Track from the pipeline crossing to Cascades, a really wild place very close to home.

The walk is 7 km long and will take three to four hours. The grade is moderate to difficult and there is a long climb out. Bring a packed lunch as there are some beautiful picnic spots.

Contact John Martyn (9449 7962,
johnmartyn@optushome.com.au)
if you intend coming on the walk
as there are plans to demolish
the St Ives water pipe and we
may have to alter the route.

In the event of heavy rain we will
cancel the walk.

Harbour to Hawkesbury

Tired of just walking the dog round to the shops? Want a challenging, all-day bushwalk in a local setting but not the Lane Cove Valley? You could try the route of the Harbour to Hawkesbury walking track in the Middle Harbour catchment. This will take you through some of the most spectacular scenery in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Details of this walk have been posted on our web site, and will be reproduced in full in our next newsletter.

George Szekeres AM

George Szekeres and his wife, Esther, were among the founding members of STEP. They were both active in the early days as committee members, and their contributions are remembered with appreciation.

Consequently it is with special pleasure that we report that in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours List, George was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his distinguished contributions to Australian scholarship in mathematics since he came to this country in the 1930s.

He and Esther, a mathematics scholar in her own right, live in Turramurra in a house surrounded by native trees and shrubs, attesting to their continuing enjoyment of the Australian native flora and fauna.

George continues his work at the University of New South Wales.

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Transport, Population and the Environment

Traffic congestion, road accidents, pollution concerns, train derailments, peak hour train conditions, station parking facilities, F3 widening and so on are constant topics in the community.

They are mostly perceived and discussed as road problems, whereas they are actually transport problems, and as transport problems they have population growth and demographics at their base.

Demographic shifts are used as arguments for additional road capacity somewhere, because they have already happened or because developers are promoting them for profit. Both are short-term pressures, which should never supersede long-term planning.

But population never seems to enter the deliberations as a determining factor for longer term planning, because there is no population policy and we have the open-ended growth scenario which seems to be accepted by governments at State and Federal levels.

Such an open-ended growth scenario will eventually see wall-to-wall development between the Blue Mountains and the beaches and between Newcastle and Wollongong.

Even if such growth remains within a population ceiling which Australia as a whole can sustain, it is not a scenario which anyone should be looking forward to with any equanimity.

If our Governments tacitly accept this scenario, they should be planning for massive public transport infrastructure to meet the future needs of such a conurbation. But there is no evidence of political will to face up to these consequences. It appears to be too long term for the three to four year political horizon.

Population being such a dominant factor in the future of

our cities and our nation, there should be a rational debate about population policy at every level of Government. But there is little enthusiasm for rational debate at Federal level.

Whereas business groups call for population of 40 or 50 million, it is by no means certain that Australia can support that population, and if the current trend of population shift to the Sydney metropolitan area persists, Sydney would face major environmental problems, including transport related congestion and air pollution.

The Australian Conservation Foundation warns that population growth under the business-as-usual scenario will result in significant environmental damage, since Australia has a high energy consumption level, a heavy material flow per capita for its domestic product and a high water use for its export production, which in turn supports our standard of living.

It argues that environmental factors must be considered as determinants for population levels, and that a large reduction in energy use, material use and water use, in absolute as well as per capita terms, is needed before a significant increase in population is sustainable.

It is worth reminding ourselves that a 2% per annum population growth, which seems innocuous enough in itself, will cause a doubling of the population in 35 years, and it is stating the obvious to say that continued growth is not possible (unless we manage to colonise Mars and a few other planets).

These are the factors which need to be debated and a population policy needs to be established, a policy which links population directly to environmental factors, with checkpoints for achievement of environmental outcomes, and which allows public infrastructure planning to anticipate and

investment to precede demographic shifts.

Fox Control

More than thirty people came to hear Nicola Mason (Senior Ranger with NPWS) and David Wilkes (Natural Resource Manager with Ku-ring-gai Council) give an interesting and informative presentation on the Regional Fox Control Program.

Foxes are native to Europe where they are becoming endangered, but they are flourishing in urban Australia. In the urban bushland interface of the northern Sydney region each square kilometre supports up to ten foxes although they are rarely seen. This area also hosts a diverse range of native animals including threatened species such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*).

Local councils with the NPWS and Taronga Zoo are undertaking a regional fox baiting program within some of the bushland reserves in the northern Sydney region. It involves considerable coordination between agencies (EPA, Department of Agriculture, Rural Lands Protection) and community notification. There are strict baiting procedures, monitoring and scientific surveys of native animals.

Foxes are wary, intelligent animals and traditional methods of control such as cage trapping, soft jaw leg traps and den fumigation have been largely unsuccessful. Research over the past ten years has shown that baiting with 1080 is currently the most effective method of fox control over large areas.

Native animals are generally immune to 1080 since it occurs naturally in Australian vegetation, especially in WA. There is some concern that quolls and other animals on the east coast may be more susceptible. Baiting methods have therefore been designed to minimise the risk.

Sand plots are laid and non-poisoned baits buried 10 cm below. The plots are monitored daily. If footprints of other animals or humans are found or if no foxes have visited the bait station is removed. If fox prints alone are seen, poisoned baits are subsequently buried and the plot is monitored daily.

Bait stations are 500 m apart and at least 100 m from walking tracks. The program avoids the fox-breeding season so cubs are not left to starve in dens.

The foxoff baits are extremely unappetising to people and relatively non-toxic. An adult would have to eat 100 baits to be affected and a child at least eight. However they are lethal to dogs and cats unless they receive urgent veterinary attention. All vets in the area have information on 1080. Whenever a bushland reserve is being baited, warning notices are posted and dogs are prohibited from entry. At the end of each program all uneaten baits are removed.

Since the program started four years ago about 250 baits have been taken. Baiting will be ongoing and its effectiveness monitored through fauna surveys and fox density studies. Already there have been increased sightings of bandicoots in the backyards in the region (and also of ticks — but that is another story).

Opening of Terrys Creek Walking Track

The official opening of Terrys Creek Walking Track which goes from Browns Water Hole to Forester Park in Epping will take place at Browns Water Hole on Saturday 21 September at 2 pm.

Come along and support this initiative of Epping Rotary involving Work for the Dole, Hornsby Council and Ryde Council.

UTS Access Road — Update

John Burke served as STEP's representative on the advisory group negotiating with the UTS to achieve a solution to their access problems which was acceptable to the community and UTS and provided protection for urban bushland. John writes that it is now time to bring STEP members up-to-date on the current status.

The DMR was involved as early as 1969 when it advised that it did not favour a road to Lady Game Drive but rather a connection to the freeway then planned parallel to Millwood Avenue in the Blue Gum Creek valley. This corridor was later abandoned along with the Lane Cove Valley freeway corridor through West Pymble. This was a success for STEP and others who had fought the freeway proposal. From this point initiatives came from the residents affected by the Eton Road access.

Following considerable lobbying the College (as it was then) had an engineering design carried out in 1976 and sought a \$420,000 grant to fund construction. The money was not forthcoming and the debate hotted up during the 1980s as the College expanded on the site.

In 1991 Ku-ring-gai Council produced a report which referred to the environmental qualities of the site and noting the harm that the proposed access road would do. It quoted a report from consultants Kinhill, which referred to the probable expansion of the campus from pressure to decentralise from Broadway and to take advantage of the 'lower building and land costs as well as the more scenic setting'. No doubt they forgot that replacing the bushland with buildings and roads would also degrade the serenity!

Kinhill added 'The early determination of a preferred route for the access road is a fundamental requirement for the master plan of the site.'

A traffic study carried out in 1985 analysed present and future volumes and considered public transport, car pooling, other traffic management initiatives and a new access road. It indicated that the new road would be a waste of money because it would create additional traffic and not ease problems around Eton Road. Perversely the report recommended the road and Council supported it.

In April 1991 STEP prepared a report which recommended that the campus should be restricted to its current size, that UTS expansion should take place where there was public transport and that all bushland be transferred to the SRA (as the Lane Cove National Park then was).

This report was distributed to aldermen, State politicians, NPWS, UTS and other interested parties. Other groups such as the West Lindfield/Killara Residents' Action Group and KuBES, as well as individuals were also involved.

In June 1991 senior UTS staff met with representatives of all groups, producing some meaningful dialogue. In September 1991 UTS produced a Community Information Bulletin setting out the problem and the options as it saw them. Following a public meeting STEP wrote to UTS to reflect the suspicion that the road would not solve the Eton Road traffic problem but was intended to serve expansion plans. The advocacy of the road as a bushfire emergency exit proved to be invalid since it led through dense bushland. STEP followed this up in November 1991 with letters to the press advocating a shuttle bus service from the railway station.

UTS persisted and produced a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) in February 1992 still supporting the new access road. The consent authority, the SRA, followed STEP's recommendation to reject the proposal.

At a meeting between UTS, UTS consultants, residents, SRA and STEP a reduction of the road's speed limit from 40 kph to 30 kph was put forward since it was a relatively short distance. This opened up further options avoiding the most sensitive part of the bushland at College Creek. At a second meeting in August 1992 STEP proposed that a road may be acceptable if its location was moved away from College Creek and all the adjacent bushland permanently preserved by means of a Conservation Agreement.

STEP supported the road in the revised location with the Conservation Agreement, because the alternative would have left the whole site vulnerable to future development.

Following a period of intense activity a new REF was prepared in May 1993 and a DA lodged with Council. STEP advised UTS that it would not support this unless a Conservation Agreement was put in place with an agreed boundary.

In August 1993 UTS undertook to 'enter into a deed of agreement ... not to build within the area of the UTS land, as shown on the attached map'. Seemingly a win-win solution had been found in the interests of UTS, the residents and the environment. The DA was approved on 24 August 1993.

Planning delays were caused because the road would traverse small pieces of land owned variously by CALM and Council, but by November 1994 UTS had produced a new DA with an EIS. At this stage the NSW Nature Conservation Council entered the fray by opposing the proposal because it (the NCC) was opposed to the loss of any bushland. STEP had taken the view that a small loss with the remainder preserved in perpetuity was preferable to the purist approach which would risk losing the lot.

Further planning delays occurred while in the meantime the success of the shuttle bus eased the residents' problem considerably.

In 1998 the Parramatta-Chatswood Rail Link appeared as a new factor since the provision of a station at UTS caused controversy and uncertainty for all parties.

During the deliberations surrounding the rail link it became apparent that UTS was losing its desire for an access road. This can only be regarded as good news if a Conservation Agreement can be concluded, and preferably for all the bushland on the UTS site.

Since then rumours and fears have abounded, ideas floated and sunk and UTS now has to adapt to the new realities and make its plans. While the concept of a Conservation Agreement is still looked upon favourably, there are senior staff changes due to occur, which will introduce uncertainty.

STEP will continue to work towards saving the whole of the bushland on the site.