



# STEP Matters

Number 135, July 2006

## The Role of an Urban Environmental Group

Near our 30<sup>th</sup> birthday it's appropriate to review again just what we are doing

STEP arose from the bulldozing of bushland for a sports centre but then went on to play a key role in the introduction of bushland management as we now know it, to lead the opposition to the Lane Cove Valley Freeway and to be involved, often successfully, in many other issues.

STEP with a membership of over 450 is one of the largest in NSW. We have an excellent, if somewhat weary, committee and are financially secure. When there are no major issues to fight there is less demand for the environmental warriors who are prepared to confront bulldozers - although those people will certainly be needed again. It is inevitable, however, that any lack of vigilance will lead to a loss of the gains we have made. There are many who seek to exploit the environment.

STEP has always published: the Plan of Management for the Lane Cove Valley 25 years ago may have been the first in NSW. Maps of Middle Harbour and the Lane Cove Valley and the Field Guide to the Upper Lane Cove Valley Bushland followed. We have published position papers on contentious issues and these have been influential. STEP has participated in countless committees.

We respond to invitations to comment on plans of management for bushland including for national parks. We meet with key managers from the organisations involved, as well as with councillors and politicians.

Every year we organise bushwalks. We have had several talks every year on subjects as diverse as the Antarctic, ticks and brush turkeys.

We have a modest programme of financial support to schools for environmental projects. We also contribute a yearly prize under the Young Scientist programme.

Finally, we run the business of the organisation. Accounts, returns, insurances etc all have to be managed. And of course we publish this newsletter.

We think this is all worthwhile. The work being done by the Blue Gum High Forest group is of the utmost importance, the proposed sale of the UTS site is a potential tragedy, the construction of the F3 to M2 link is still not finalised, Sydney is looking to double its population over the next 60 years or so with consequent environmental stress; the list of issues is endless. There are wider issues, such as global warming and the consumption of the world's finite resources, where STEP can contribute to local opinion formation.

We are looking at publishing a photographic and interpretive book on the wonders of our Sydney bushland and, inevitably, other such opportunities will come along.

The agenda is quite different to 25 years ago. The urgency of global issues means that dealing with local matters will be in vain in the absence of solutions to our global warming, energy and population problems. Our newsletter will deal more and more with these wider issues because they will be very much local in effect.

The environmental challenges will be never ending. To be ready to deal with them we must keep our membership and finances at healthy levels and continue the renewal of the committee. If we achieve all that then we shall continue to be effective.

## Walk: Cumberland State Forest

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> August 2006  
**Address:** Off Castle Hill Road  
**Time:** 1.30 pm  
**Duration:** About 2 hours  
**Meet:** At visitor centre  
**Enquiries:** Neroli Lock 948-95794

This is an easy to moderately difficult walk. It is an opportunity to see one of the larger remaining pockets of Blue Gum High Forest. There are a lot of exotic native plantings that are interesting in their own right. Cumberland Forest is also a popular bird watching area.

There is a nursery, forestry section and visitor centre.

## Australian plant identification course

**Date:** Over four Saturdays 12/19 August and Sat 2/9 Sept 2006, each session 9am to 1pm  
**Meet:** Visitor Centre, Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, St Ives

**Registration:** Registration for the course, run by the Australian Plant Society, can be made with Alec Fisher 9499 2239, Fred Langshaw 9449 1541 or email [secretary@blandfordia.org.au](mailto:secretary@blandfordia.org.au) or see web site [www.blandfordia.org.au](http://www.blandfordia.org.au)

The course will last a total of 16 hours - each session will have 3 hour of lecture and practical work, including microscope investigation of plants, followed by an hour of plant ID in the Gardens. The presenter, Joan Webb, has an enviable reputation as an engaging and enthusiastic, skilled educator with a vast wealth of plant knowledge

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### STEP Committee

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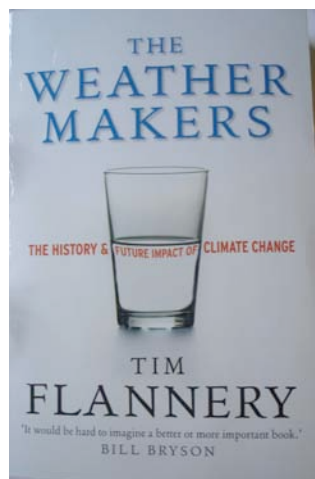
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## Global warming

A year ago we reviewed, and recommended, Professor Ian Lowe's new book, *Living in the Hothouse*. Ian is the president of the ACF. Now Tim Flannery has published *The Weather Makers* and this is also an important book.

Flannery writes very well but the subject is such that it is hard to say that this is an enjoyable experience. It is nevertheless a fascinating and engrossing book as we are exposed to the evidence of global warming, the science behind the predictions, and the consequences of warming being allowed to continue.



Flannery was a global warming skeptic until a few years ago but has now taken up the cause with enthusiasm. His message is that we are headed for disaster unless we reduce greenhouse gas production, that it is already too late to prevent a lot of extinctions but that far worse is to come unless we start to act now.

He finishes on a note of optimism in that we really can do something about it in a range of ways. It would be nice, however, if George Bush and John Howard were to realise the nature of the looming catastrophe and act.

## Brush turkeys - friend or foe?

Dr Ann Goth lectured on Brush Turkeys to over 40 people at our June talk. These birds are becoming much more evident around Sydney and in backyards in recent years.

They are part of an Australasian family of birds called megapodes that build, and bury their eggs in, large leaf litter mounds that, while decomposing, give off heat that is sufficient to incubate the eggs. The chicks emerge and make their own way in the world without having seen another brush turkey, let alone their parents

The research that Ann is carrying out at Macquarie University is pioneering stuff as very little was known about them. Her research includes building robotic chicks to study behaviour, researching reactions to predators and radio tracking to look at survival rates.

We have seen that the Australian Plant Society thinks brush turkeys are "destructive pests"! (June 06 Blandiflora) Maybe we should ask Dr Goth if these Australian birds can be bred to ignore Australian plants! But that raises a good point – as foxes and other predators are brought under control are we going to have complaints about bandicoots on the lawn and koalas in the trees? We have already had a wallaby drowned in a Turrumurra pool and another killed on Burns Road – what next Red-crowned Toadlets in the cistern, echidnas in the sandpit?

We hope that all STEP members are kind to their brush turkeys.

Ann's research can be found at <http://www.pr.mq.edu.au/macnews/ShowItem.asp?ItemID=309> and also at <http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s1131408.htm>

## Their cheating ways

Clive Hamilton, author of *Growth Fetish*, is the executive director of the Australia Institute. In a speech he gave at Macquarie University in June he pointed out our Government's hypocrisy in paying lip service to the need to reduce greenhouse gases while relying on ineffective voluntary programmes to do the job. Australia has been able to boast about emissions reduction under Kyoto only by taking account of the decrease in land clearing since the base date of 1990. Ignoring that, Hamilton said that our emissions have grown by 25.1% which is estimated to increase to 30% by 2010.

Hamilton points out that we did not eliminate the production of ozone depleting gases by relying on consumers to pay more for the replacement technology. Neither should we for greenhouse gases.

While our Government has commenced a review of nuclear energy and is involved in CO<sub>2</sub> geosequestration trials, it is producing "thin air reasons" for killing off wind energy projects and has shown no taste for encouraging renewable energy research and implementation. This is hard to understand when the modeling it commissioned showed that "the costs of making the transition to a low-carbon economy would be very small." But perhaps not so hard to understand when one appreciates the power of the coal, oil and gas lobbies.

We need to make a fuss.

The Sydney Morning Herald article of 8 June, *Cheating our way towards Kyoto* is acknowledged as a source for this report.

## Do we need nuclear power?

**Date:** 24<sup>th</sup> July 2006

**Time:** 8.00pm

**Place:** St Andrews Church Hall  
Vernon and Chisholm Sts  
South Turrumurra

Keith Alder AM, a past Director of the Lucas Heights Nuclear Research Establishment and past General Manager of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission will be speaking at a function arranged as part of the St Andrews Neighbourhood Programme. This is not a STEP organised talk. We have no idea of Mr Alder's point of view but it will be an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the issue.

## News briefs

BP has announced it is to supply over 200 million litres of biofuel a year by 2008. There will be 120 million litres of biodiesel from tallow with the balance in ethanol.

An Australian company, Ozmotech Pty Ltd has developed the capability to recycle plastic waste into diesel fuel. This includes plastics that are not now recycled. Unfortunately the first plants are to be installed in Europe.

A 30 MW boiler refit is being undertaken in Queensland to trial a 90% capture of coal power's CO<sub>2</sub>. The CO<sub>2</sub> will be liquefied for transport and geosequestration.

Thanks to Ecos issue 130

## Capitalism – the myths, the money and the environment

The financial press and media tell us every day about the necessity for growth. This dictum is applied both to individual firms and to the whole economy. Whether growth is necessary or not is very important to the environmental movement.

Exponential growth, as Henry Ford remarked, is a very powerful thing. If world economies grow at a real 3% pa then they will double in size every 25 or so years. This implies a doubling of the total use of resources in that time and would clearly be unsustainable. It may be futile micro managing environmental outcomes throughout the country if global warming and resource exhaustion threaten them all.

When our treasurer brings down the budget he announces growth projections with pride. Now some of this growth is not real growth but merely reflects inflation. It's the residual or real growth that he's always proudest of.

The components of real growth include growth due to productivity improvement and growth due to population growth. If we want to know why population growth is so prized we need to look, as always, for the money trail. Without population growth, for instance, the building and construction industries would be reduced in size. This would affect both the builders and their suppliers. There would have to be adjustments but our economic system is adept at that. We no longer have vinyl records or typewriters and the print film industry is undergoing huge change. Running down the building industry over, say, 30 years would allow some of our brightest, who would otherwise have been engineers and tradesmen, to enter other occupations where skills are in short supply. It would be a good thing but the wailing from the vested interests would be deafening.

Many firms and industries have great lobbying ability and financial power and continuously preach doom should our population not continue to increase sufficiently for their needs. These firms are doing nothing wrong but they have had success in having their self-serving point of view prevail when the decisions should be one for the wider community.

It is very hard to find a rational justification for eternal real economic growth. There is always talk of recession and unemployment but

such claims are unfounded. There would of course be adjustments to be made along the way but not nearly as many that will flow from greenhouse and energy crises.

Make no mistake, breaking the hold of the conventional wisdom that says that growth is essential will not be done easily. Those businesses that don't grow or that contract are seen, prima facie, as failures. On the other hand CEOs of firms that grow are rewarded with money and applause, both of which are intoxicating and self-reinforcing. Our public companies are valued on the stock exchanges on a number of criteria, one of the most prominent being a multiple of earnings. By this process, the present value of future cash flows arising from expected growth is factored into share prices. CEO's and boards are then largely judged on their ability to predict future profits from predicted growth

*The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."*  
Winston Churchill

*"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan, "Before the year is out."*  
John O'Brien

Capitalism is a most robust thing. It's the practitioners who make all the fuss about change. We must, therefore, be careful to distinguish on the one hand between the market system and the forces that it responds to and its servants and acolytes who run the companies on the other. There were outcries when slavery was abolished and every time the working week was reduced. Closer to home, the fuss when the dollar was floated, when FBT was introduced and superannuation made compulsory, was truly deafening. The enormous changes in agriculture, information technology & energy are other examples of our system coping.

The claim that growth is essential for our wellbeing is a myth, perpetuated by those with vested interests. The problem that it causes comes from Henry Ford's observation. At a population growth of just 1% pa Sydney will have 30 million people in another 200 years. If China reaches our level of per capita consumption, the world demand for resources will almost double. There are plenty of other

depressing figures. It will be a race to see whether resource exhaustion or greenhouse gets to us first. Either way, we are headed for catastrophe unless we curtail our consumption.

So it is easy to conclude that we need a mind-shift. We need our governments and economists to work on reducing population and economic growth while preserving per capita wealth. It's quite possible but needs a little insight, foresight and backbone. But how can that be achieved?

The change agent must be government intervention. Just as law was necessary to get us wearing seatbelts or refraining from drink-driving, government intervention will be necessary to effect changes in the structure of the economy.

The first job though is to convince our governments that change is necessary, that there are real dangers out there unless we change and that the future of our civilisation is at stake. If it decides to change our economic reward systems - the government has a huge array of fiscal, monetary, regulatory and legislative options at its disposal. For instance rather than rewarding gross GDP we could reward per capita wealth creation. Environmental effects must be valued and integrated with our national and corporate accounts, technology that preserves resources and the environment without diminishing wealth must be rewarded – and so on. It won't be as hard as learning to live without the slaves or 7 year olds in factories. These changes bringing limits to growth must happen. The question is whether we are capable of bringing about the change before resource scarcity and greenhouse plunges us into war and another dark age.

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### You don't agree?

In our newsletters we often present points of view that some will not agree with. We don't apologise for that as it is only by questioning, debating and learning that we shall advance the cause of the environment. In future we shall be looking at just why the destruction of the built heritage of Ku-ring-gai is bad for the natural environment, why greenhouse is a real and present threat, why our governments are stifling alternative energy generation - and some good news stories besides. We would be thrilled to get feedback.

	Unit cost	Number	Cost (\$)
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Single (per financial year)	\$16		
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Life	\$200		
<b>Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley</b>	\$30		
<b>Maps of Walking Tracks</b> (cost of maps to non-members is \$20)			
Lane Cove Valley	\$15		
Middle Harbour Valley. Sheets 1 and 2 Bungaroo and Roseville Bridge	\$15		
Middle Harbour Valley. Sheets 3 and 4 Northbridge and North Harbour	\$15		
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