



# STEP Matters

Number 137, November 2006

## Planning in Sydney Goalposts on Wheels

The planning goalposts for the Sydney region move so often that they may as well be on wheels to save the trouble of digging them up for every move.

The first post-war plan was the 1948 *Cumberland Planning Scheme*. Remember the 'green belt' concept? Its demise was heralded in 1959 when 50 square miles was released for housing; only tiny bits of green now peep out from between the concrete slabs and roads.

The 1968 *Sydney Regional Outline Plan* followed, then *Sydney into its Third Century* in 1988. The latter didn't deliver on its promise, however, as it was followed by *Shaping our Cities* in 1998 and then by the 2004-2005 *Metropolitan Strategy*.

Now STEP has argued before that old planning isn't always good planning and that remains true. What is wrong, however, is that there is not the slightest notion of limits to growth in any of the planning for Sydney, or for anywhere else in Australia.

When country towns hit a brick wall and their population falls we are seeing an unplanned limit to growth. Do we have to wait for Sydney to hit some sort of wall, or, being an intelligent society, can we decide what is appropriate and plan accordingly? Trees grow until they reach an optimum size for their stability, nourishment and environment. If only we had such sense!

## End of Year Barbecue

The traditional STEP December barbecue will be on Sunday 3 December from 4.30 in the park behind Leuna Ave at the end of The Broadway at Wahroonga. Harry and Neroli Lock will supply the barbecue and hot water – BYO food and everything else. Come along and meet other STEP members

## Make STEP more Effective

Keeping in touch with members is difficult; we really have only this newsletter and the meetings and walks. Such communication is a little one sided, however, and the committee would like to hear more about what you think and what you would like us to be doing. Getting member feedback on an issue is too expensive and time consuming to do by mail and response rates are not likely to be good.

One way of improving this situation is the use of email. If we had email addresses, and your permission, we could ask for your views on issues and receive very quick response. It would also allow us to inform you of specific issues between newsletters.

So if you would like to be connected send your email address to [secretary@step.org.au](mailto:secretary@step.org.au).

## You Missed the AGM?

In October some forty people heard a spellbinding lecture from Associate Professor Lesley Hughes on global warming. One opinion was that it was a good as Al Gore's movie but in half the time!

You also missed a chance to obtain a copy of our annual report but, never fear – it is on the website. If you do not have internet access please let us know and we shall mail you a copy.

The previous committee nominated again and there were no additional nominations. Once the TABS amalgamation is complete, however, the committee will be appointing an additional member or two. (See the annual report.)

The reluctance of people to become involved in committee work bedevils every community group. A good crisis always radicalises a fresh batch of recruits but in calmer times volunteers are scarce indeed.



## Christmas Ideas

You need look no further than STEP for the best Christmas gifts! *The Field Guide to the Bushland of the Lane Cove Valley* is a professional publication full of information. The walking track maps of Middle Harbour and the Lane Cove Valley are the best available. For further details of these publications go to [www.step.org.au](http://www.step.org.au) and search under Publications. To order download the order form from the web site or use the form on page three of this newsletter.

Another gift idea is a STEP membership. If you know someone who you think would be interested why not give a year's membership?

## Have you renewed your membership yet? We need you!

If the year '06' is printed underneath your address on page 4 your membership is due for renewal.

Please complete the form on page 3, indicate any changes needed on the address label, and mail the completed form and payment (by cheque payable to STEP Inc) to: Step Inc, PO Box 697, Turramurra, NSW 2074.

Contact Helen Wortham if you have any problems on 9144 2703 or at [secretary@step.org.au](mailto:secretary@step.org.au).

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## STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978  
PO Box 697, Turramurra, NSW 2074

## Climate Change – the Psychological Tipping Point Achieved

A lot has happened over the past few weeks. Scientists, the environmentally concerned and other rational people were voices in the wilderness, as far as the Australian government was concerned, until very recently. Now, however, our politicians and bureaucrats are falling over one another to show their concern. Amazing!

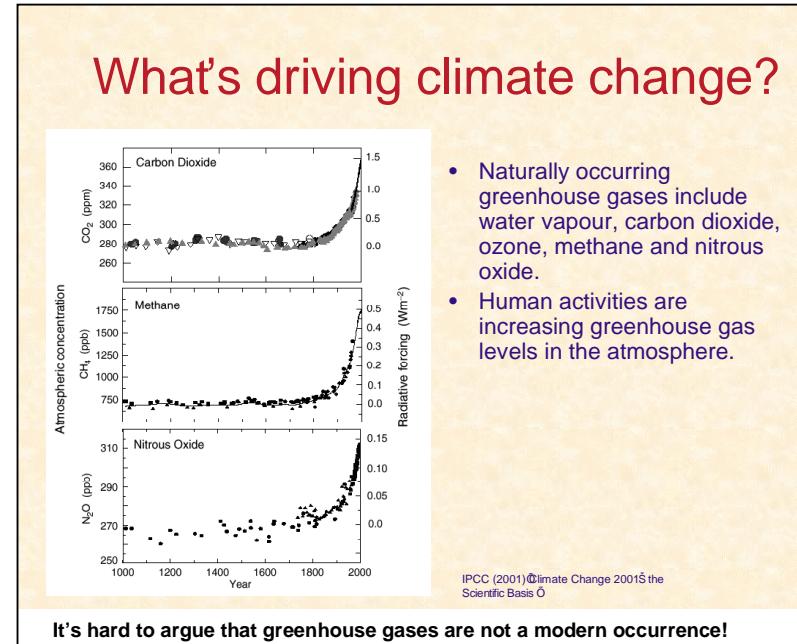
But what brought this about? Of course the relentless pressure from scientists and others was a factor but there were others. The drought, even though the extent to which it has been affected by global warming is not certainly known, had farmers talking about climate change rather than drought. Politicians touring the bush came under pressure. Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was doubtless a factor. When the man who was nearly president of the USA devotes his time to such a cause it can't be dismissed as a left-wing plot.

There were, however, two other factors at work. The first was the influence of James Murdoch, Rupert's son, who reputably influenced the whole Murdoch empire to about-face. Evidently the British paper *The Sun* ran a heading *We were wrong* referring to global warming and the Murdoch outlets throughout the world, including the *Telegraph* and *Australian* fell into line. Politicians take a lot of note of what Rupert says!

The second was the Stern Report. Sir Nicholas Stern is the head of Britain's economic service and produced a six hundred page report which has had a huge impact. Stern, along with most other leading economists, believes that the economic cost of stabilising carbon dioxide emissions now comes at a cost of 1% of GDP. This is a cost we would hardly notice. Where he breaks new ground, however, is in his estimate of the cost of doing nothing. He estimates that this would cost between 5% and 20% of GDP. This possibility, especially at the higher end of the range is what has got the attention of governments, including ours.

He reckons that most economists have taken average predictions of temperature rise and ignored the possibility of high increases of 5-6°C. In addition, science has refined its estimating methods and the higher results are now seen as more likely.

His point is that governments should



- Naturally occurring greenhouse gases include water vapour, carbon dioxide, ozone, methane and nitrous oxide.
- Human activities are increasing greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere.

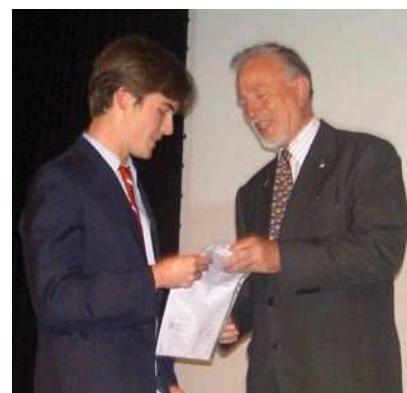
take action against the worst possibilities because otherwise the consequences might be catastrophic. Giving up 1% of GDP is a small price to pay for avoiding catastrophe such as the melting of the Greenland ice sheet. That would raise sea levels over six metres and flood New York and London amongst many other places. This approach is what we know as the precautionary principle; if something might do unacceptable harm then don't do it! We buy house insurance even though the chances of one burning down is tiny; spending 1% of GDP to insure the world against a much more likely event seems very reasonable indeed!

While there is no doubt that part of the purpose of the commissioning of the Stern report was to influence the USA to take climate change seriously it is nevertheless a serious effort that has received wide praise.

Now the newspapers are selling the environmental message every day and our governments are coming up with new solar, wind and other projects almost weekly. There are, however, still debates to be had. Is nuclear part of the long-term answer? Is wind generation worthwhile? What about solar? As the politicians and the vested interests jockey for position the role for the rest of us will be to keep them all honest. So the whole discussion will move to another stage. There is plenty of work to do yet!

### Young Scientist Award

STEP provides an annual award for high school scientific projects. This year's winner, Robbie Bishop-Taylor of Great Lakes College at Forster, is shown below receiving his award and cheque from STEP member Syd Smith who handled the presentation for us. Robbie's project was *The Identification of Critical Salinity Thresholds for Upper Estuarine Plants*.



### STEP Committee

John Burke  
Bruno Krockenberger  
Tim Gastineau-Hills  
Michelle Leishman  
Andrew Little  
Neroli Lock  
John Martyn  
Helen Wortham  
Jim Wells

Newsletter editor - John Burke

## In Case You Missed It

The USA population has just passed the 300 million mark and is headed for 400 million by 2043. *The Economist*, October 14, reckons that this is a good thing.

Two engineers, writing in Civil Engineers Australia, August 2006, ask why biosequestration of CO<sub>2</sub> is not being promoted. In a 20 year study over 90% of CO<sub>2</sub> bubbled through ponds was absorbed and converted into biomass that can be used for biofuel. The programme was stopped by the US Department of Energy because 'it was uneconomic at current oil prices'. Sounds familiar?

The Pennant Hills District Civic Trust and others are campaigning for the abandonment of the plans to join the F3 to the M2 with a tunnel under Pennant Hills Road. They want a new road leaving the F3 somewhere south of the Gosford exit, crossing of the Hawkesbury River and joining the M7 at Dean Park. This will be good for opening up the empty west and Harry Triguboff will be able to tell them the best way to build through Marramarra and maybe Dharug or Popran National Parks.

The Australian Wildlife Conservancy is buying its 15<sup>th</sup> property, the 200,000 hectare Wongalara station abutting Arnhem Land. It now has 917,000 hectares conserved. It's worth a look when you are thinking of making donations ([www.australianwildlife.org](http://www.australianwildlife.org)).

The 10 most serious invasive garden plants still for sale in NSW (*National Parks Journal*, Feb-Mar 2006) are Banana passionfruit, broom, Cat's claw creeper, Glory lily, Holly leafed senecio, Hybrid mother of millions, Lippia, Madeira vine, Mother of millions and Yerba de hicotea. Don't buy them and, if you see them in a nursery, complain!

## Feeding the Animals

Every scientist in the field seems to advise against feeding wild fauna but the practice continues apace. Near the weir in Lane Cove National Park there is a sign asking people to not feed the birds and invariably there is a happy family all around the sign feeding the birds. Many of us have friends who like to feed the possums and Kookaburras.

### Why do we do it?

The urge to anthropomorphise, it seems, is very strong. In addition there seems to be some feel-good factor that we are helping hungry animals. People begin to bond with the animals that keep coming back and don't want to betray their new friends by stopping the feeding. Or at least that's how this writer has analysed it.

Feeding, except for nursing sick or injured animals, is a cruel thing to do. It interferes with natural food seeking behaviour, it corrupts animals' diet, it interferes with normal animal social behaviour and engenders unnatural dependence on humans. Results include eggs to fragile to hatch, bone deformities and more.

If you are doing it stop now! Animals are not for our entertainment. Be their friend and never, never feed them!

## Award to St Ives Park P.S.

The long-term future of the natural environment is in the hands of our children. There have been tremendous advances in the quality of environmental education in our schools over the past twenty-five years and this is very encouraging. STEP wants to assist this process wherever possible and so have just awarded St Ives Park Primary School a grant of \$2,250 to assist in the completion of their bush classroom. This has been paid from the Pam Morse bequest.

## Saved by Tallowa

The total water picture for Sydney's dams back to July is given in the table below. Sydney Water does not define its terms too well but the first column is evidently water supplied to consumers and excludes environmental flow in the Hawkesbury. The Shoalhaven column is the water pumped from the Tallowa Dam in the week and the storage change over all the dams is in the right column.

There are several points of interest.

Week ending	Water supplied	Shoal-haven	Storage change
9/11/06	9601	1305	-6630
2/11/06	10522	209	-12100
26/10/06	10266	2450	-10480
19/10/06	10677	5600	-10520
12/10/06	10300	5200	-11410
5/10/06	10130	4100	-9150
28/9/06	10358	2600	-8590
21/9/06	9798	2800	+2250
14/9/06	9001	4150	+32580
7/9/06	9883	7700	-3950
31/8/06	9470	7700	-4950
24/8/06	9733	7700	-6230
17/8/06	9633	7300	-3360
10/8/06	9161	7000	+1170
3/8/06	9358	4900	-1090

All figures are megalitres

Firstly Sydney Water has stopped reporting environmental flows as last time we looked they were reported weekly. This does not bode well for the health of the rivers. Secondly note the huge volumes, relative to Sydney's usage, that are being pumped from the Shoalhaven Tallowa Dam. Without this water from the Shoalhaven Sydney supply dams would be down to less than 20% of capacity instead of the current 39%. Thirdly, the high inflow caused by the rain in September demonstrates that some really good rain will have a dramatic effect.

	Unit cost	Number	Cost (\$)
<b>Membership</b> (only complete if 06 is shown on address label on next page)			
Single (per financial year)	\$16		
Family (per financial year)	\$20		
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		
<b>Donation</b> (donations of \$2 or more tax deductible)			
E-mail address	3	Total cost	

## Destroying the City - When will our Councillors Get It?

It is probably unbecoming to say we told you so but a little drama now being played out in Turramurra is a taste of what is to come as we wreck our urban milieu. Some land locally known as the *horse paddock* has become available on the abandoned Lane Cove Valley freeway route.

There is very little bush on the site and the government was, logically enough, intending to rezone it residential 2c in accord with the land either side. There is a problem, however; we have a severe shortage of playing fields.

Michael Duffy, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald (*Obesity game plan short of a few fields*, SMH, 27 Aug 06) pointed out that the effects of urban consolidation together with an upsurge in sport participation, has produced a field shortage. How could the planners of 50 or 100 years ago have realised that we were going to pack so many people in? They didn't, and the current crisis is the result.

Councils and sporting bodies all over the city are struggling with the problem. Councillor Elaine Malicki, when mayor, hosted a 'regional sports forum to discuss the field shortage'. She was reported as saying, 'the shortage means many sports codes can't take more players into their competitions'.

So in Turramurra there is a bit of anxiety. The Kissing Point Progress Association has surveyed residents and there is talk of a public meeting where a lot of verbally dextrous sporting people would be pleading their case.

But why are we writing about this in the STEP newsletter? STEP has no

opinion on the choice between houses and a playing field, although one of our committee members reckons that a market garden would be the best use. We are writing about it because this is the tip of a very nasty iceberg.

As the growth-without-limit brigade drives our population ever upwards the demand for space for infrastructure of every sort will increase accordingly. We have just agreed to 10,000 new homes in Ku-ring-gai over the next 25 years; about a 25% increase. It won't be long until bushland, including that in national parks, is being taken for schools, hospitals, fields and the like.

**It won't be long until bushland, including that in national parks, is being taken for schools, hospitals, fields and the like.**

Ku-ring-gai councillors seem unaware of the danger. They are very concerned about what happens this week, this month or this year but there is no evidence that any of them cares one jot, or has even thought, about what sort of a city we will be leaving our grandchildren and beyond.

Our councillors comfort themselves with the thought that the additional housing will be mostly along the railway corridor but they have not stopped to ask what happens next. They have neither asked where the playing fields and the like to service the 25% increase in population will come from nor asked what lies ahead when the next urban plan forces another 10,000 residences upon Ku-ring-gai (see Page 1).

### The rice grain fable

We all tend to forget the power of exponential growth. There is a fable, The Legend of the Ambalappuzha Paal Payasam, in which Lord Krishna, having beaten the king at chess, claimed his prize of one grain of rice for the first square on a chess board with the number of grains being doubled for every succeeding square. So for the second square he is to get 2 grains, for the third 4, for the fourth 8 and so on. It's hard to imagine this being more than a small bag of rice by the 64<sup>th</sup> square.

By the fifteenth square, however, there are 16,384 grains of rice and the counting of them is getting tedious! By the twenty fifth square the king is starting to wonder what he got himself into as there are 16,777,216 grains. By the thirtieth square there are 536,870,912 grains and he knows he is in trouble! When we get to the sixty-fourth square there is a need for 18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains.

So it is with Sydney's population. Everyone from the Prime Minister down is locked into exponential growth without limit and no one wants to admit that this is unsustainable. We are on the 10th square and the exponential explosion is about to hit us. If only more of us could see the problem!

Councillors are of course restricted by the government on many planning issues but they are in a powerful position to influence public opinion. It's time they did. If you feel the same why not have a chat to a councillor?

(See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambalappuzha\\_Sri\\_Krishna\\_Temple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambalappuzha_Sri_Krishna_Temple) for the fable.)



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