



STEP Matters

Number 165 June 2012

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STEP Talk – Speaker : Syd Smith – 26 June 2012.

8.00 pm – St Andrews Church Hall, corner Chisholm and Vernon Streets, Turrumurra.

Topic: “*Educating our students and our community for a sustainable future: the problems and the progress*”

Syd has taught students in inner London, worked at ABC Radio National as an education adviser and for 4 years as school education director on the NSW Central Coast. In 1996 he took up the position of manager of the Environmental Education Unit in the NSW Curriculum Directorate of the then NSW Department of Education and Training where he led the team to develop the *NSW Environmental Education Policy for Schools* and later initiated the Sustainable Schools Program which ultimately led to the AuSSI program now operating in all states and territories.

Syd now works as a consultant to schools and communities in Environmental Education and Education for Sustainability. In 2010 he was awarded an honorary PhD by Phranakhon Rajabhat University in Bangkok for services to Thai Environmental Education. Syd has written school textbooks in Sustainability Education, Geography, Work and was a co-author for a school atlas program.



STEP Inc

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The Curious Saga of Stringybark Ridge

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice”. (Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll.)

STEP is sympathetic to the wish by local sporting groups for additional sporting facilities, but our primary purpose has always been, and remains, the protection of our remaining natural urban bushland. This is particularly the case in those conservation areas that already enjoy legal protection, such as the Stringybark Ridge area in the Berowra Valley Park. Yet there seems to be, without any community consultation, a concerted push on to hurriedly dismantle the existing legal protection for Stringybark Ridge to allow for the construction of a range of team sporting facilities and amenities.

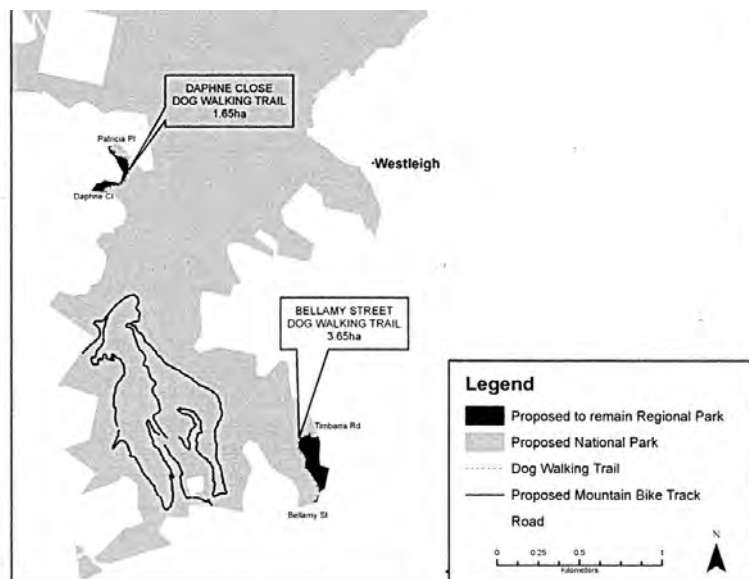
Who and what is exactly behind the very strange goings on at Stringybark Ridge remains a bit of a mystery. In our Update section on page 10, you will read the announcement of the intention that Berowra Valley Regional Park be given National Park status. This follows the official creation of the current Regional Park in 1998, after an extended period of gradual growth through land additions dating back to the 1960's. The Stringybark Ridge area, many years earlier abandoned as a pony club site, was included as part of the new Regional Park.

In April 2005 a new Plan of Management (PoM) was adopted for the Regional Park, following two years of community consultation with a wide range of local sporting and recreational groups, neighbours and local residents, environmental and community groups and other agencies including Hornsby Shire Council. Management of the Park was to be a shared arrangement between the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Hornsby Council. The PoM states that the main recreational use of the Park is for bush walking, with provision for the walking of leashed dogs on three management trails. The PoM is of course a statutory document and, once adopted, no operations may be undertaken except in accordance with the PoM.

In April 2006 Hornsby Council, after a careful review of potential sports grounds in the Hornsby Shire, adopted a *Sports Facility Strategy Plan*. This Plan discounted the possibility of ever using the old pony club site at Stringybark Ridge for active sporting purposes. This remains official Hornsby Council policy.

Recent events have however seemingly challenged the notion that the long settled legal protection enjoyed by areas such as Stringybark Ridge actually amounts to anything at all. On 10 April 2012 Hornsby Mayor Nick Berman wrote to local MP's Matt Kean (Hornsby) and Greg Smith (Epping), suggesting that Hornsby had a need for additional sports grounds for soccer, cricket, AFL, netball and “other sports”. The letter went on to suggest that the old pony club site at Stringybark Ridge could be used to accommodate such sportsgrounds, plus the attendant amenity blocks and spectator support arrangements. The letter

goes on to acknowledge that it would not be legal to use the site for such organised sport and so asks the two MP's if they could intervene and raise the matter with the relevant Minister (Robyn Parker).



Given the announcement a few days later about the proposed change of status for Berowra Valley Regional Park, for which Hornsby MP Matt Kean was given much of the credit by Environment Minister Robyn Parker, many locals began to wonder if the two events were connected in some way. Hornsby Councillor Wendy McMurdo had trouble reconciling what the Mayor had said in his letter with what Hornsby Council had previously discussed and agreed upon. She consequently moved a Notice of Motion that Hornsby again write to Messrs Smith and Kean, specifically **not** supporting the creation of new sports grounds at the old pony club, but instead to seek out less sensitive sites. In the end it was agreed by a narrow majority to defer further consideration on the matter pending Council receiving an additional briefing. (When in doubt, defer action until you know which way the wind is blowing).

STEP contacted both Matt Kean and Greg Smith, asking them to not support any request to change the legal status of the Park so as to allow active team sports to be provided within its area of protection. Kean replied that the proposals would be “considered by the department in line with proper process” and further noted “your concerns”. Smith did not favour us with response.

STEP then tried to obtain a copy of a map of the official boundaries of the proposed new National Park. We approached NPWS, who referred us to the Ministers Office, who in turn promised to contact us to discuss the matter. No contact was ever made.

Local conservation and community groups were by then buzzing with speculation about possible “back room” deals being done, one possibility being a trade off between gaining National Park status for an agreement to site the new sports fields in the long abandoned pony club area. One local community group reported that they had in fact received verbal confirmation from a local elected representative that a decision in principle had already been taken to allow the Stringybark Ridge land to be excised from the rest of the Park, and to be used for sporting fields.

STEP approached the Premier to seek clarification as to whether there had in fact been any change of Government policy with regard to altering existing levels of protection so as to allow team sports to take place within protected park boundaries. The Premier responded, noting our concerns and promised to raise the matter with the Minister for the Environment, Robyn Parker.

Seeking to find a solution rather than to pick a fight with our community neighbours, STEP thereafter wrote to the Minister suggesting that the Government consider upgrading some of the poorly resourced sporting facilities to be found in local high schools, and to make them available on a time-share basis with the rest of the community. (See the copy of the STEP submission below). Copies were sent to local MP’s for information and for their support. No response to this submission has as yet been received from the Minister.

At the time of writing, it is still uncertain as to what, if anything is finally planned to happen at Stringybark Ridge. We are told that there is legislation currently waiting to go before the NSW Parliament, expected to be debated in the near future, which will throw more light on the matter. What is clear however that is the Stringybark Ridge area was some years ago set aside with a high level of environmental protection after extensive community consultation and involvement, but that may now be at risk, with the wider community apparently sidelined.

It is somewhat troubling that that we may have some locally elected representatives who are quite prepared to place at risk the future protection of such areas without any discussion or involvement with the very community who were instrumental in gaining that protection in the first instance. Robert Menzies once said; “A man may be tough, concentrated and successfuland never contribute to his country anything more than a horrible example”.

Let us all hope that is not the case here.

Editor’s note:

STEP understands that when the National Parks Adjustment of Areas Bill is presented to NSW Parliament, it will not itself contain an amendment to excise the old pony club land. Instead, its future will be determined by the PoM for the new Park, as will be proposals to possibly locate the new mountain bike trails in the same area (see page 10).

Hopefully this time a real community dialogue will take place, before any controversial PoM amendments are contemplated!

Left: STEP members walk at Stringybark Ridge, March 2012



STEP Letter to Robyn Parker.

18 May 2012.

*The Hon. Robyn Parker, MP
Minister for the Environment, and for Heritage
Level 32, Governor Macquarie Tower,
1 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000.*

Dear Minister,

Re: Stringy Bark Ridge, Berowra Valley Regional Park

STEP Inc is a local community based environmental group, with a membership of over 400 in the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai area. We have operated in the area on a non-political basis for over thirty years. We are delighted that Premier Barry O'Farrell has been one of our members for much of that time!

Our aim is to preserve natural bushland in the area from alienation and degradation. We understand that Hornsby Council has recently written to the member for Epping, the Hon. Greg Smith, as well as the MP for Hornsby, Matt Kean, asking for their help to arrange for team sporting facilities to be allowed within the Berowra Valley Regional (soon to be National) Park.

STEP well understands the competing pressures for the use of recreational space in expanding urban areas. We have had to contend with this as an issue for most of our existence. We therefore write to you today to suggest a better way forward on this matter; a way that might become a "win/win" solution for the Government to use elsewhere, as this is an issue not specific to our area.

Our suggestion is that the State Government explores the use of sporting facilities currently attached to local State High Schools. These are often poorly resourced and under utilised. They would benefit from receiving additional funding, in return for which they would become "time shared" resources with the local communities.

This is of course a model that the Victorian State Government is currently exploring. It is however also a model that has been successfully used right here in Sydney. Both the Narrabeen Sports High School and the Cherrybrook Technology High School have gone down this pathway, with financial support from their local Councils. It is working well and both the children at the schools and the users in the local community are benefitting from the much improved facilities, which are in turn no longer sitting around idle for long periods as was previously the case. (Hornsby Council has of course already indicated that they have funding for additional sporting facilities in the area.)

STEP believes that there are local High Schools in the area of Stringy Bark Ridge who would benefit from the same outcomes, as would their local sporting communities. STEP would be prepared to assist in any way we can to help explore this as an option, as we see it as a smarter use of very expensive community resources and also potentially a win for the environment. For us, urban environmentalism is much more than fighting against loss of natural areas. It is essential to look many decades ahead and to educate and inspire the community to appreciate what we have if the battle against the unthinking and destroyers is to be won.

The role of innovative solutions such as this one, supported by leaders such as you, will be crucial to long-term success in this area. Natural areas may be maintained by regeneration and maintenance but they can only be saved if they are not lost, piece by piece, to our ever increasing need for housing, schools, roads, playing fields, and hospitals.

STEP believes that we need to think "outside the square" for better solutions and we hope that you will agree to pursue the concept further.

Yours sincerely,

Native fish in Lane Cove in Crisis

STEP Committee member Dr John Martyn looks at the decline and ongoing threats to the native fish populations on the North Shore

Waterways of our local area are under levels of environmental stress which are at least as great as that experienced by the woodlands and forests of the surrounding bushland. Bushfire, for example, doesn't just affect the hillsides. Fire-exposed soil and burnt woody debris wash into the creeks under the downpours and deluges that often follow the summer fires. Sandbanks build up and overwhelm deep, shady pools, sometimes in a matter of a few days. If those sandbanks survive and grow they are gradually colonised by a whole range of terrestrial weeds and hardly ever by native plant species.



Our North Shore habitat, where we smother the ridgetops with houses and roads, has polluted and changed the chemistry of its local waterways. Formerly mildly acidic streams (perhaps originating from peaty hanging swamps) have been alkalinised by concrete, mortar and other building materials, and contaminated with rubbish and sewage leaks. The runoff from all the hard surfaces has grossly amplified the flood events, and this is especially apparent in the Lane Cove catchment where, in this recent wet summer, yet another series of floods has scoured and flattened the creek side vegetation and dumped great piles of woody debris and rubbish along the banks, and even along low-lying sections of the Great North Walk. Shreds of plastic rubbish are suspended on branches sometimes more than 5 metres above normal water level. Aquatic plants, both native and exotic, have been torn from their anchorages and washed downstream to who knows where.

Freshwater fish; can the local ones survive?

How can fish, not to mention other aquatic animals, survive in such an environment? Well, the answer is "with great difficulty!" In the years I have lived locally there has been an obvious decline in native fish numbers and species over most of the upper reaches of the catchment.

You used to be able to spot the commonest native fish, **Cox's gudgeon** *Gobiomorphus coxii*, almost anywhere from tiny creeks to the main stream channels. You might need to get your eye in to see them, camouflaged, resting motionless on the bottom, but they were usually present, especially in the larger pools in summer. Some years they'd disappear though they always seemed to return; but in recent years most of the pools have emptied. Cox's gudgeon haven't left the river system completely; you can spot them occasionally in Porters Creek and Lorna Pass. A breeding population survives in odd corners because baby ones still congregate at the Lane Cove weir in early summer, and this summer I saw a number of them in Avondale Creek, but unfortunately this robust little species is hanging on in the catchment only by the skin of its pectoral fins!

Sometimes called **native trout**, **native minnow** or **common jollytail**, *Galaxius maculatus* seems to have vanished from the catchment. Hopefully it is still there swimming around, going downstream to breed in the tidal reaches, and I've just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. It looks like a tiny, slender trout, and you would sometimes see several in a couple of hours of looking into the creeks when the water was clear in summer. All species of *Galaxias* are actually part of our Gondwana legacy, just like the Antarctic beech, and are found on other southern landmasses.

The **Australian smelt**, *Retropinna semoni*, is another little native fish that is still around but is increasingly hard to find. It swims in fresh or brackish water in little wriggling schools. It may be confused with the introduced pest, the Mosquito fish *Gambusia holbrooki*, but once you see it you won't mistake it. I saw some in Porters Creek a couple of summers ago, but that was a once-off – there's been nothing since.

And then of course there are **eels** and **bass**. Eels can go almost anywhere in a drainage system, slithering across land on wet nights – they even make it up the edges of the Warragamba Dam wall (and you can chase that one up on the internet). Therefore they can easily reach all corners of the Lane Cove catchment; and they do, both long-finned and short-finned species. But are they as common as in past eras? It's doubtful, but there is really no hard information to judge by. **Bass** were once reportedly seen as far upstream as Coups Creek. Nowadays they don't make it nearly so far though they are certainly thrive in the long, almost canal-like stretch of water upstream from the weir, and the weir's fish way is a definite aid to their survival.

Is that all the species that are in there?

No, of course not. If you wander the banks upstream from the weir you will probably have seen **feral carp** or **goldfish**, and hopefully schools of **mullet** that have found their way up the fish way (or are

they actually **freshwater mullet**, a different species?). But there is much more in there besides. Occasional schools of deep-bodied, fork-tailed, silvery little fish feed along the weir sill, and some tiny, mottled fish I photographed were identified by the Museum as **pandaka gobies** (possibly *Pandaka lidwilli*). Other species of gudgeon have been recorded, such as **striped gudgeon** *Gobiomorphus australis*. But the reality is that, unlike the shallow streams and clear pools of the upper catchment, we do not have an accurate picture of what is in the deep, dark waters of the lower reaches; and without a proper scientific fish survey we probably never will!

More bushland under threat in Beecroft/Cheltenham

Article by Sheila Woods, well known local bush regenerator.

It seems that even really worthwhile projects like the North West Rail Link could mean the loss of more of our local bushland. North West Rail Link (NWRL) proposes to build an emergency access facility next to Cheltenham Oval on the site of four netball courts. The purpose of the facility is to allow access in the event of an emergency in the rail tunnel between Epping and Franklin Road.

This site already has rather narrow local road access off Castle Howard Road to the oval. On its southern side the area is right next to the east-bound lanes of the M2 which is currently being widened on that side. There are two options under consideration in the EIS for the access of heavy construction vehicles to the site. One is to use the M2 and, according to engineering advice, this should be possible by widening the breakdown lane from 2m to 3m for 150m to allow trucks to enter and 150m to leave the site safely. Only about 16 truck movements a day are predicted for the construction of the access tunnel.

The other option is to build a new paved road through the bushland reserve to Kirkham St, a distance of approximately 400m, back onto the local road system. Once construction is complete the new road would only be used for maintenance or in the event of an emergency in the tunnel. In the event of an emergency it would seem to be of greater value to have the choice of direct access to the M2 both to get emergency vehicles quickly to the site and to take any injured passengers to hospital.

The bushland in question is Blackbutt Gully forest in good condition. It was gazetted reserve over 100 years ago and remained intact until 1995 when the southern edge near Devlins Creek was taken for the building of the M2. This is some of the best bushland in the area, much enjoyed by both the local and wider community. It would be a big loss for more of this bushland to now be taken for yet another road.

On 4 May STEP made a submission to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure on this matter. The submission can be viewed on the STEP web site at www.step.org.au. Members who would like to know more or who might like to make their own submissions can view the full EIS 1 and its accompanying documents on the Department of Planning website: www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au or go to www.northwestrail.com.au

<p><i>Editor's note:</i> STEP sent the submission below to the Director, Infrastructure Projects, in support of the points raised in the above article by Sheila Woods. Copies were also sent to local members of Parliament. Transport for NSW has acknowledged the STEP submission.</p>

“Re: Submission to the EIS 1 for the NWRL Project relating to the Cheltenham Intermediate Services Facility. (Application No: SSI-5100)

STEP Inc is a community based environmental group with a membership exceeding 400, most of who are based in the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai area of Sydney. STEP supports the development of public transport and is in favour of the construction of the North West Rail Link.

STEP would however like to make specific comment on the two options under consideration for permanent access to the Cheltenham Intermediate Services facility. These are:

1. Directly on and off the M2 requiring new on and off ramps from the motorway, or
2. On and off Kirkham St on a new road through bushland to the proposed site.

STEP strongly favours the first option. The second option, namely constructing a new road through the bush from Kirkham St to Cheltenham Oval, will significantly impact bushland which is, and always has been, in good condition. This bushland was in fact gazetted as a reserve over one hundred years ago and remained fully intact until 1995, when the southern edge near Devlins Creek was taken for the building of the M2, and currently it's widening. STEP believes that it would be a tragedy if more of this quality Blackbutt Gully forest was to be lost for the building of yet another road, particularly

where other access options exist.

A recent survey of the area by botanists from the Australian Plant Society identified a list of over 100 species of native plant on site and some to the area to the west. *Persoonia laurina* and *Trochocarpa laurina* were found and both are uncommon in the area.

This area of bushland is important to the local community and is well used by bush walkers, dog walkers and cyclists. It is one of the nicest bush tracks in the area as it goes through such good quality bushland. It would be difficult, probably impossible, to offset a similar area of bushland in such good condition and certainly not in the area of Beecroft and Cheltenham.

STEP and its members urge you to adopt option 1, namely access directly in and off the M2.”

Below are two photographs of the bushland which would be affected if a new road was built. On the left can be seen the support posts for the erection of the new noise wall on the M2. Any road would be constructed in front of that wall. On the right can be seen the bush from the other side of the M2. It is an impressive stand of Blackbutts which would be considerably diminished if the road was built through it.



“Food Scarcity... fact or fiction?” (Or simply good for business?)

“We (Australia) can have the best of both worlds – food security at home and less food insecurity abroad”.

This is the deceptively seductive theme of a new “thought leadership” report from the Australian office of global law firm Baker & McKenzie International (BMI) [1]. The research for the report was conducted by Beaton Research + Consulting in early 2012, based on interviews with a range of senior Australian executives working in the local food supply chain and agribusiness.

Unfortunately no interviews appear to have been conducted with anyone in the scientific community as to the level of sustainability of food production in this country, although it is clear that there are widely divergent views on the matter. Michael D’Occhio of the University of Queensland has said: “Australia never has been and never will be a food basket or the food bowl of the world. The reality is that we produce food for 60 million people. How Australia contributes to food security globally is through knowledge, training and technology transfer.” [2]

Despite the above limitation, the BMI report makes for some interesting reading. For example, Kate Carnell, the CEO of the Australian Food and Grocery Council, states in it that each year the food and

grocery industry feeds about 22 million Australians and about 60-80 million overseas. This may indeed come as something of a surprise to those who recall her October 2010 media release in which she claimed that Australia had in fact become a net importer of food and grocery products [3].

Carnell went on to warn that the looming cuts to water use in the Murray-Darling Basin would also affect Australia's ability to make competitive food products for export. Indeed, overall, availability of water was identified as the greatest challenge to Australia's food supply by the majority of the BMI report respondents. In this respect, the BMI report appears to closely reflect the current business view of the challenges facing global food systems.

While the daily media cycle often portrays the business world as agitating for less governmental regulation, this apparently is not the case in the food industry. In fact the BMI report shows that there is strong support for increased levels of government intervention and regulation in many areas, including the activities of supermarkets in food retailing. Nearly half of all respondents also rated foreign investment as a threat, with strong protectionist sentiments also applying to the issue of international trade barriers. 45% agreed that the Australian Government should impose higher barriers to favour Australian-made commodities.

It is perhaps unsurprising that only about a third of the BMI reports respondents saw climate change as a serious issue. What however is surprising, given the carbon tax controversy, is that only 27% saw regulation around the environment and climate change as a concern. The industry also strongly favored genetically modified food as part of the delivery of food security.

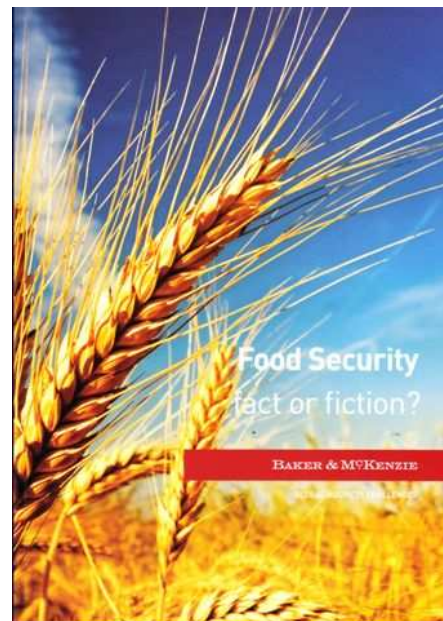
Global population growth is rated a food security concern in the BMI report, but population growth within Australia is generally seen as being positive. Respondents seem to assume that Australia has a comfortable ability to both feed itself and any likely level of future population. This assumption was not seriously questioned in the BMI report, although elsewhere in Australia this is not the case. In fact the *PMSEIC Working Group* [4] reported in 2010 that:

"The likelihood of a food crisis directly affecting the Australian population may appear remote given that we have enjoyed cheap safe and high quality food for many decades and we produce enough food today to feed 60 million people. However, if our population grows to 35 – 40 million and climate change constrains food production, we can expect to see years where we import more food than we export."

Indeed, Australia's Chief Climate Commissioner, Tim Flannery, has repeatedly stated that because Australia is a very old land with by far the world's least fertile soils, it is as a result very difficult to make a living from it. He estimated that the ideal population for this country should be under the current level of 23 million; probably closer to half that number. The BMI report is silent on the possible implications that would flow from that being the case, nor does it offer much by way of insight into what new developments may be needed to build a sustainable base for Australian food security over the coming years. For example, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), in its 2003 report on "The key sustainability challenges facing Australia's food industry", identified a number of challenges facing the development of a robust sustainable food industry in this country. They included:

- *Repairing our land and rivers* – matching talk with real action on the ground
- *Environmentally modernising the industry* – doing more with less and doing it smarter.
- *Protecting Australia's great natural areas* – sustaining nature for the future of farming and fishing

Given the current lack of effective action in most of the above areas, many would perhaps argue with the BMI respondent's view that we already have reached a level of sustainable food security in Australia.



Key Issues and Updates

Lane Cove National Park

Plan of Management: STEP members may recall that mid last year we drew attention to the fact that the Plan of Management (PoM) for Lane Cove National Park had been subject to lengthy delays (it had in fact originally been targeted for completion in 2010). Now nearly a year later we are saddened to learn that it is still not available, but that it will “hopefully” go on public exhibition in the near future. As we said last year, we can but wait and hope.

The PoM is the legal charter that governs what may and may not take place in a National Park. STEP will be awaiting the PoM with interest, as we have raised a number of key planning matters with LCNP. These include:

- Future levels of funding for the area, which have suffered a significant reduction in discretionary funding available for maintenance and rehabilitation work. As reported in the last issue of STEP Matters, this matter has of course since been raised with the Premier, and we await his response to our invitation to come on a walk with us to see for himself the significance of this issue.
- Track and trail policy. STEP supports well constructed tracks and trails for both walkers and cyclists, but only in appropriate areas as laid out in our 2010 *Position Paper on Bushland Tracks and Trails*. Illegal mountain bike trails in sensitive areas of the Park are causing significant damage and an effective policy to deal with these thoughtless riders needs to be developed and enforced.
- Control of nutrients into the bushland. As laid out in the June 2010 edition of this newsletter, STEP believes that there are better ways to deal with the build up of toxic phosphorous levels in our ecosystems, caused by water borne nutrients entering the bushland.

Ku-ring-gai

St Ives Showground and Precinct Lands: Another very slow moving development! STEP in 2009 was involved in a community consultation process set up by KMC to help establish a long-term plan for the future use of the St Ives Showground area. The Draft Options which emerged from this process were approved by KMC in June 2010 and we were advised that KMC would appoint a consultant to draw up a Plan of Management (another PoM!) by no later than June 2011. Nearly a year later, our latest advice is that KMC are still trying to make an appointment to see the appropriate NSW Government Departments to discuss the latest draft PoM.

In case these delays act to dim the memory, the STEP concerns in this matter were, and still are:

- the future level of protection to be offered to the threatened Duffy’s Forest vegetation community, as a result of the proposed location of road works and the creation of a wide sealed cycle track system through this sensitive area, and
- the fact that in our view some of the current draft proposals constitute Key Threatening Processes to the Duffy’s Forest community.

We await the Plan of Management with interest. Any bets on some progress by 2013?

The Glade (possible construction of a synthetic athletics track by local private schools): Most STEP members would by now be familiar with the above controversial proposal, which was covered in some depth in our last newsletter. STEP Treasurer, Stephen Procter, has subsequently written to all councillors expressing STEP’s deep concern regarding the perceived threats to The Glade oval at Wahroonga. Stephen received a written response from Councillor McDonald in which he made the following points:

- Councillors who voted to support the motion did not necessarily either “agree or disagree” with the concept plan put forward by the schools
- The basis of the Council motion was to enforce a “formal review” of the concept, which was proving to be somewhat of a moveable feast during the community consultation phase
- The intention is to enforce a standard process so that Council would be able to “factually (not emotionally)” assess the proposal

Councillor McDonald ended by adding: “there is absolutely no reason to think that this will be a ticket for approval”. STEP would also like to believe that this will turn out to be the case!

Hornsby

Mountain Bike Facility: STEP has been an active participant in the mountain biking debate over the past three years. We have sought to lead a wide ranging community discussion on the matter, so as to arrive at a sensible long-term policy that tries to meet all legitimate user needs while still protecting the remaining natural bushland in our area. STEP's 2010 *Position Paper on Bushland Tracks and Trails* sets out our position and has subsequently been widely endorsed by other bodies, including the Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

Nowhere has the mountain bike debate been more vocal than in Hornsby Shire. STEP was therefore pleased to attend a recent Hornsby Council meeting in which the proposed trail in the Hornsby Park/Old Mans Valley area was unanimously endorsed by all Councillors. The final proposal has been extensively reviewed and amended following detailed submissions from many bodies and members of the public, including from STEP. The bushland in the area is substantially degraded and cleared and therefore largely meets the recommendations set out in the STEP Paper for the location of such trails. It is STEP's hope that the establishment of such a trail will reduce the pressure for other trails in good quality bushland areas, and also remove the need for thoughtless mountain bikers to develop illegal trails in high conservation areas.

Berowra Valley Regional Park: STEP Matters readers may recall that in our August edition last year we carried an article by Bob Salt, advocating that Berowra Valley Regional Park be given National Park status. On Monday 14 May 2012 the Sydney Morning Herald carried a report announcing that Robyn Parker, Environment Minister, had approved the change of status, subject to some minor excisions for existing dog walking tracks and the "possible introduction of mountain bike tracks". Minister Parker noted in her media release that the reason for the change was that "the level of protection offered by a regional park is not enough to protect the special conservation and community values of this area". (See also the article on Stringybark Ridge on page 2).

While STEP welcomes the enhanced level of protection carried by National Parks, we are concerned that the effective level of funding for camping facilities and conservation management will decrease. Up until the change of status the Park was under the joint management of NPWS and HSC, with the latter making substantial annual contributions in cash and kind, especially improvements in the Crosslands area and in running the forty plus bush care groups who operate in the Park. Given the effective cessation of funding for such essential bush maintenance work in the Lane Cove National Park, we can only urge that both the NPWS and Hornsby Council sit down to address a common sense cooperative approach to the funding of community facilities and bushcare in the new Park.

Mountain Biking in National Parks

STEP members may recall that NPWS has identified three potential sites in northern Sydney for the design, assessment and construction of a track of around 10km in length. (See: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/parkmanagement/NorthernSydneyMtBProgram.htm>)

The three potential sites are located at Bantry Bay and Kamber in Garigal National Park and Stringybark Ridge in Berowra Valley Regional Park. STEP is a part of the community consultation group set up to assess the suitability (or otherwise) of these sites.

Field days were held over late October 2011 and earlier this year to inspect the potential sites. The NPWS undertook a preliminary environmental assessment over the same period. This suggested that the Bantry Bay and Stringybark Ridge sites have better potential than the Kamber site.

Detailed environmental impact assessment is currently underway along the proposed route of the Bantry Bay and Stringybark Ridge tracks. This has to date involved field surveys and literature reviews in respect to threatened species, Aboriginal sites, soils, catchment values and other relevant environmental factors. On the basis of the environmental assessment and community feedback the NPWS will select one of the sites for further environmental assessment and detailed design of the track. This information will be compiled into a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) which will be placed on public exhibition for comment. The REF is expected to be placed on exhibition in May 2012.

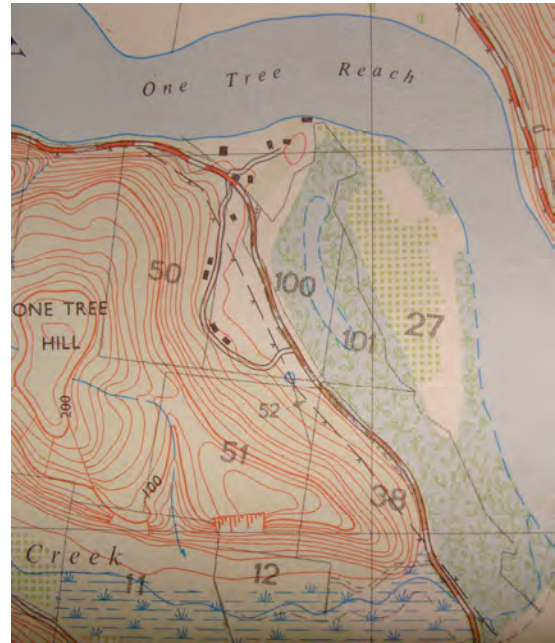
[1] Copies of the report are available to download from: <http://www.bakermckenzie.com/Australia/Sydney/>. [2] Straight, K, Landline, 26 June 2011, *The Future of Food*, ABC, Australia, viewed 5 July 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/landline> [3] <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/australia-a-net-importer-of-food-20101027-173kl.html>. [4] *Australia and Food Security in a Changing World. Report of the *PMSEIC Expert Working Group October 2010. (*Prime Ministers Science Innovation and Engineering Council)*

One Tree Reach Estuarine Wetland Reserve

Article by STEP member Margery Street. (This is an abridged version of an article appeared in the May Blandfordia, the newsletter of Australian Plants Society – North Shore Group).

In 2010 Hornsby Council's Bushland Team acquired 8 hectares to complete 13 hectares of estuarine wetland along the Hawkesbury River at Laughtondale, downstream from Wisemans Ferry.

Five hectares of the wetland was Crown land managed by Council. The reserve supports five Endangered Ecological Communities including Forest Red Gum River-flat Forest (a form of the listed community 'River-flat Eucalypt Forest on Coastal Floodplains'), Swamp Oak Floodplain Forest, Swamp Mahogany (*Eucalyptus robusta*) Forest, Floodplain Paperbark Scrub and Floodplain Reedland (the last three are forms of the listed community, 'Swamp Sclerophyll Forest on Coastal Floodplains'); habitat for 35 bird species including the glossy cockatoo, 11 threatened fauna including three species of bat, and breeding habitat for aquatic invertebrates and native fish. The wetland also filters runoff before it enters the River.



Above photo: CMA Map Gunderman



On 26 April Hornsby Council's Bushland Management Advisory Committee (BMAC) made a site visit and assisted the Bushland Team in planting indigenous species of Eucalypt, Melaleuca, and Breyntia propagated from seed collected at the site. Since mowing ceased 2 years ago indigenous seedlings are appearing. *Goodenia ovata* over one metre tall grows profusely.

Left: Bower of Satin Bowerbird

BMAC stepped carefully through the marshes to see a drain cut in the last century. As a result of draining and lowered water levels, sediment and acid sulphate soils are present. The tide at One Tree Reach is about two hours after Fort Denison; both the drain and Dalgetys Creek are tidal. The Committee inspected the mangrove swamp where Council will construct a boardwalk for public access and interpretation

Right: Swamp Mahogany Forest



For your diary: forthcoming events from STEP and others

Talk: Jeff Angel – Thursday 14 June 2012

FOKE have arranged for Jeff Angel, Executive Director of the Total Environment Centre, to speak on the subject "The urban environment: going backwards or forwards?"

Time: 8.10pm. Place: Uniting Church Hall, corner Karranga Avenue and Arnold Street, Killara.

Walk: City view lookout/Lorna Pass – Sunday 24 June 2012

Jill Green will lead a walk through the North West top area of Lane Cove National Park. Join us for tea and coffee afterwards at Thornleigh shopping centre.

Time: 9.45 for 10.00am departure.
Meet: Rail overpass, Thornleigh Station.
Distance: Approximately 5 km.
Difficulty: Moderate. Some fairly steep descents.
Book: Contact Jill Green at jillgreen@gmail.com or 9489 8256.

Walk: In the new Berowra Valley National Park - Sunday 15 July 2012

John Martyn leads a walk which features tidal inlets, mangroves and salt marsh, gallery rainforest and tall forest trees flanked by sandstone woodland. There are fine examples of shell middens. It is a beautiful walk along the calm waters of Berowra Creek framed by steep sandstone hillsides and cliffs. Tributary Calna Creek has the best example of salt marsh within easy reach of the North Shore. You usually either see or hear lyrebirds somewhere along the route.

Time: 10.15am for 10.30am departure. About 3 hours.
Meet: The north end of Crosslands car park. Crosslands is reached by following Somerville Rd (which goes on forever), Hornsby Heights, right down to the water where there is an extensive camping ground and car park. Road is now sealed despite the warning sign at the start.
Length: Total distance is about 6 km.
Difficulty: Moderate; there are no long climbs, but there are a few short, rocky ones.
Note: If you are using satnav, please key in "Somerville Rd" and not "Crosslands" otherwise you will end up at Crosslands Rd on the wrong side of Berowra Ck. (It happens!). Bring hats, sun screen if needed, water and proper walking shoes.
Book: Contact John Martyn, preferably by email at johnmartyn@optusnet.com.au or by phone on 04497962.

Feature walk: Royal National Park, Palm Jungle, Cliff Track – Sunday 12 August 2012

This year's feature day walk has been rescheduled to August and is regarded as one of the great walks of Sydney. It includes beautiful tall forest and extensive coastal views from the Cliff Track and the rare littoral rainforest of Palm Jungle. With nearly 50 rainforest tree species this is one of the finest examples of littoral rainforest in the Sydney bioregion

Start: 9.45 am for 10.00 am start.
Finish: 4.00pm
Meet: Car park, adjoining Otford Lookout
Difficulty: Medium.
Book: Bookings essential. Limited to 15 walkers. Contact: Andrew Little, 9924 7212 (after 7.30pm), or email: aalittle@optusnet.com.au. Please indicate if a lift is required.



Talk: Robin Buchanan and Nancy Pallin – Tuesday 18 September 2012

Two leaders in the restoration of natural bushland in the Sydney region will lead a discussion on the topic. Time: 8.00pm. Place: St Andrews Church Hall, corner Chisholm and Vernon Streets, Turramurra.

Walk: Excursion to Bar Island: 21 September 2012

STEP is delighted to provide early notice of a planned excursion to Bar Island on Friday morning, 21 September 2012. Bar Island is an uninhabited island on the Hawkesbury River, rich in Aboriginal and European history. Access is by water ferry from Brooklyn.



The island is habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna. The excursion will enter from the historical wharf site, observe the shell middens in the vicinity, walk to the remains of the St Johns Church site (built in 1876) and the cottage whose occupants were caretakers of the church and cemetery (over fifty of the area's workers and settlers lie buried on the island). Hornsby Council now manages the island and in 2008 received a Keep Australia Beautiful Award for heritage management for its work to conserve the natural, built and Aboriginal heritage of the island. At the conclusion of the trip lunch will be provided in Brooklyn. Cost: \$25 per person. Numbers are limited, please contact Barry Tomkinson at: Barryt@bigpond.net.au or on 9484 9934.

Second Annual STEP Lecture: 6 November 2012

STEP members are reminded that Prof Ian Lowe, President of the Australian Conservation Foundation, will present the second annual STEP Lecture in November 2012. Professor Ian Lowe AO has degrees in engineering and physics. He is currently emeritus professor of science, technology and society at Griffith University in Brisbane, an adjunct professor at Sunshine Coast University and Flinders University.



The author of 20 books and more than 500 other publications, Professor Lowe's contributions to environmental science have won him a Centenary Medal, the Eureka Prize for promotion of science, the Prime Minister's Environment Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement, the Queensland Premier's Millennium Award for Excellence in Science, and the University of NSW Alumni Award for achievement in science. Professor Lowe was named Humanist of the Year in 1988 and made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2001.

Professor Lowe was elected ACF President in 2004. He is a patron of Sustainable Population Australia. His latest book, "Big or Better? Australia's population debate" was reviewed in the last issue of *STEP Matters*.

Trees: the ultimate green investment?

Article by Gregory Moore, a Doctor of Botany at University of Melbourne.*

Perhaps it is a pity that so many Australians think of our parks, gardens, streetscapes and urban landscapes only in terms of their aesthetics. While green spaces are beautiful and decorative, these attributes can mask the many functions vegetation serves in cities, to the point where it's economic, social and environmental benefits are overlooked. Yes, trees are beautiful; but more than that, they save our cities a lot of money.

Cities are biodiversity hot spots because of the variety of habitats available in public and private open

space, including front and back yards. Urban landscapes and trees have been wonderful but silent assets in our cities for decades and even centuries.

They are major urban infrastructure assets. I often hear it said that; “There are better things to use water on than plants and gardens”, but I challenge you to name them. What else delivers so many benefits immediately: benefits that last centuries into the future, which prolong healthy lives and make cities both sustainable and liveable?

At a time of climate change, it is worrying that both private and public open spaces are threatened by urban renewal and development that puts at risk long-term sustainability. In many of these developments there is insufficient open space – public or private – to plant large trees, and the opportunities for vegetation to ameliorate the heat island effect, lower wind speed, provide shade and reduce energy use are lost. This affects the economic viability of such developments, as well as its long term environmental sustainability.

The shade provided by trees drops temperatures by up to 8°C: there is real economic value in that. Shade can reduce air conditioner use by 12-15%, which also decreases carbon emissions from our largely brown-coal-generated electricity. When 11 million trees were planted in the Los Angeles basin, it saved US\$50 million per annum on air conditioning bills. Large trees were removed from school grounds in the name of safety after the Black Saturday fires, without thought of the shade they provided. Consequently, large shade sails had to be provided to protect students from excessive summer sun.

It is more difficult to place a value on reduced wind speeds (up to 10%) due to the presence of vegetation, or on protection that trees provide from hail. However, we do know that under climate change winds will be stronger and that severe storms will be more prevalent. Indeed, Victoria has already suffered the effects of several major wind and hail storm events over the past few years.

Urban vegetation also removes atmospheric pollutants. It was calculated that the vegetation of New York provided US\$10 million of benefit in pollution removal in 1994. Sadly there are few similar studies for Australian cities. However in the only study of its kind, economists found that each Adelaide street tree provides a minimum annual benefit of \$200 per year and that it was an underestimate of the real value.

Vegetation also holds and absorbs water during more intense rainfall events – unlike concrete and paved surfaces. The economic value of reducing localised flooding could be substantial. Vegetated landscapes, especially those containing trees, improve human health, extend life spans, reduce violence and vandalism, and lower blood pressure. Vegetation humidifies the air, easing breathing and reducing the need for medication in those with respiratory difficulties. In reducing the urban heat island effect, trees can also substantially reduce the excess deaths that occur, predominantly among the elderly, during heat waves. It is often forgotten that the fires of Black Saturday killed 172 people, but the heat wave surrounding it was responsible for 374 deaths.

There is ample evidence that treed landscapes foster both active and passive recreation. Green and leafy environments will be one of the vital strategic tools in dealing with children lacking exercise and becoming obese, encouraging an ageing population to exercise and curbing ever-increasing health costs. The human health benefits can save society a truck-load on medical and social infrastructure costs. Melbourne is one of Victoria’s biodiversity hot spots. The parks, gardens, streets and front and backyards provide a very diverse range of plant species that generate a myriad of habitats and niches for wildlife. High-density urban developments and inner city renewal make it virtually impossible to grow trees in places that were once green and leafy. We rarely ever see the real costs of such developments.

In the past decade tree populations in many Australian cities have declined, particularly with the loss of private open space. While the costs, damage and nuisance values attributed to trees are widely known, the benefits they provide are often subtle and under-appreciated. Urban vegetation provides economic and ecological services to society. They are assets which warrant the expenditure of resources such as labour, energy and water.

Such expenditure is not wasted: trees and urban landscapes provide far more economically and ecologically than they use. In any comprehensive and fair calculation urban trees and landscapes are worth more than they cost.

**This article was originally published on The Conversation – theconversation.edu.au.*



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		Postage for Sydneys Natural World and Field Guide	\$10		0
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				Total cost	\$

STEP Information

Committee for 2012: President: Jill Green. Vice President: Barry Tomkinson. Secretary: Helen Wortham. Treasurer: Stephen Procter. Committee: Anita Andrew, John Burke, Andrew Little, Tim Gastineau Hills, John Martyn, Robin Buchanan, Don Davidson.

STEP Matters: The editor of STEP Matters for this edition is Barry Tomkinson, who is responsible for all information and articles unless otherwise specifically credited. The STEP Committee may not necessarily agree with all opinions carried in this newsletter, but we do welcome feedback and comments from our readers, be they STEP members or not.

Feedback: Send complaints, praise, comments or letters to secretary@step.org.au. Please feel free to share you copy of the newsletter with friends, neighbours and business colleagues.

Note: All editions of STEP Matters can be viewed on line, usually with full colour illustrations.

New members: New members are always welcome to join STEP and to make themselves available for the Committee should they wish to do so. The effectiveness of STEP is a factor of the number of members we have. Please encourage your like-minded friends and neighbours to join. See page 15.

Rare event: Lane Cove River flows one metre over weir – 22 April 2012 (4.00pm)



Photo: Thanks to Simon Nicolls, Ranger, Lane Cove National Park.

