



STEP Matters

Number 168 October 2012

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Second Annual STEP Lecture: 6 November 2012

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

In delivering the 1991 Boyer Lecture series Professor Ian Lowe, AO lamented the lack of consideration of long term consequences in the management of Australia's economy and environment. Twenty years later little has changed. In his latest book, *Bigger or Better? Australia's population debate*, he says "the future is not somewhere we are going to but rather a place we create by our own actions – or inactions – now."



Professor Lowe will deliver the annual STEP Lecture on 6 November. The title of the Lecture is

"The challenge of a sustainable future: converting cumulative impacts into cumulative benefits."

Ian Lowe is emeritus professor of science, technology and society at Griffith University and has been president of the Australian Conservation Foundation since 2004. As author of 20 books and more than 500 other publications, Professor Lowe's contributions to environmental science have won him the Prime Minister's Environment Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement and many other awards. He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2001.

End of year BBQ

STEP invites all members to our usual end of year get together to be held from 4.30 pm on Sunday 16 December in the park behind Leuna Avenue at the end of Broadway at Wahroonga. Harry and Neroli Lock will once again supply the barbeque fire and hot water but please bring everything else.

This is always one of the best opportunities to meet other STEP members and we hope to see you there.

In the event of wet weather we will meet at Barry Tomkinson's house. If a change of location is necessary details will be put up on the website by 3 pm on the day.

STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978

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Annual General Meeting – 9 October 2012 – Schools Debate

Following the Annual General Meeting STEP hosted a debate between Cheltenham Girls and Epping Boys High Schools. Epping spoke in the affirmative on the topic, which was "Hunting in National Parks is Environmental Vandalism, not Smart Conservation". A vigorous set of arguments was presented by each side. The adjudicators decided that the winner was Epping Boys.

We hope to arrange another debate next year.

President's Annual Report

2012 has proven to be an unexpectedly busy year. After a year in office the NSW State Government started to roll out some new legislative proposals that are hostile to the environment. In many cases these are also contrary to their own pre election rhetoric. These proposals, and STEP's response, have been covered in detail in STEP Matters during the year. An outline is also provided later in this report.

Committee

Committee's work includes:

- Keeping informed by liaising with local councils and their staff and national parks staff and members of the local community
- Reviewing and commenting on local developments
- Writing submissions on government reports and proposals relating to the environment and land use planning
- Publishing 5 (or more) issues of STEP Matters each year, walking maps and books on the local environment
- Organising a program of regular walks, talks and public lectures.

I am very grateful to STEP's committee that is ready to put in their time to provide insightful responses to issues that arise. We are fortunate to be able to draw on a wide range of expertise.

We welcome new members to the Committee who would like to help make a contribution to our work. Meetings are held on the first Monday of each month except January.

Barry Tomkinson

We are very sorry to be losing Barry Tomkinson as Vice President and a Committee member following his and Penny's decision to make a sea/tree change. Barry joined STEP early in 2007 when STEP merged with the Thornleigh Area Bushland Society (TABS). He has been an active Committee member ever since and was President from October 2008 to October 2011. During this time he has facilitated the development of the STEP *Position Papers on Bushland Tracks and Trails* and *Population* and the submissions on the SAN site, St Ives Showground Precinct Development and overseen the STEP input into the contentious State Government proposals to introduce

mountain bike trails into our remaining areas of good quality urban bushland. . These projects required many hours of analysis and liaison with NWPS staff and local councils. He edited STEP Matters for 3 years with great flair for incisive commentary and discovery of interesting material.

John Burke

We express our appreciation for the 17 years of contributions to the work of the Committee (including 6 years as President) that John Burke has made to STEP. He has made major contributions to our work on the Sydney Adventist Hospital and UTS Lindfield developments and the *Position Paper on Population*. He has now decided to retire from the Committee but we are pleased that we will still be able to call upon his wisdom when required.

Accounts

Our net assets declined by a small amount over the year largely owing to the expense of our contribution to the No Hunting in National Parks campaign. Sales of publications were reduced compared with last year as there were no new releases. Income from membership fees was uneven following the introduction in 2010-11 of the 3 yearly payment option at a reduced rate. Membership fees mostly cover the cost of the newsletter so that publication sales and grants and donations are our major source of funding for environmental campaigns.

This year we received a grant of \$3,500 from Ku-ring-gai Council for the installation of information signs on the STEP Track in South Turramurra. We hope to see these signs in place by the end of the year.

Secretarial

Helen Wortham has once again provided STEP with invaluable management support in membership record keeping, website support and event organization. Don Davidson has ensured our website is kept up to date.

Education

We continue to support the Young Scientist Awards and will host a debate between two local schools following the AGM. We have funds set aside to support suitable school environmental projects via an annual grant system. Details on the application process are provided on our website.

Bushwalks

We organised walks in all but the hotter months mostly in the Berowra and Lane Cove Valley areas with one longer excursion into Royal National Park to view some rare forest areas. Bushwalking is a great way to experience the wonderful variety of landscapes and ecosystems that Sydney people are so lucky to have on our doorstep. Thanks go to Barry Tomkinson, Frank Freeman, John Martyn, and Andrew Little for organising and leading these walks.

Talks

STEP organised four public talks during 2012 covering permaculture, bush regeneration, the amazing ecology of fungi and the teaching of sustainability in our education system.

After the AGM we will host a debate between 2 schools on the hot topic of hunting in national parks. In November the second annual STEP Public Lecture will be delivered by Professor Ian Lowe on the topic of *The Challenge of a Sustainable Future*.

Newsletter

There has been plenty of information and issues to fill the pages of *STEP Matters* during 2012. This bi-monthly newsletter is our main means of communicating our views and concerns to members, local councillors and state politicians, as well those of other contributors on local and wider environmental issues. We aim to be informative and non-political. We welcome feedback from readers (both positive and constructive criticism) and contributions of articles that will be of interest to members.

Submissions

We made numerous submissions and proposals during the year to local and state government ranging from short comments to detailed analysis. Some of these required many hours of research and consideration by Committee members, in particular Barry Tomkinson, Andrew Little and Robin Buchanan. Their efforts are much appreciated. These submissions are put up on our website and provide a valuable resource for anyone who wishes to learn more about current environmental development and management issues.

Publications

Our books and maps continue to sell well and provide a steady source of income to support our work. We are very grateful for the work of Dr. John Martyn in producing these comprehensive sources of geological and ecological information. We will also soon be releasing a new book by John on the weather of south eastern Australia, John is also working on a revision of the Lane Cove Valley map.

We were delighted when John won the 2012 Ku-ring-gai Environment Award for his publications and his work with Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Councils running walks and talks.

Hunting Rally

Despite previous statements to the contrary, the O'Farrell government decided in June to pass legislation proposed by the Shooters and Fishers Party to allow recreational hunting in certain national parks by volunteer hunters. As explained in our special STEP Matters July issue, STEP is strongly opposed to hunting in conservation areas on several grounds, in particular public safety and the ineffectiveness of volunteer hunting in reducing feral animal numbers. STEP decided to support the National Parks Association in organizing a rally in Wahroonga Park. This was highly successful with over 350 people attending the rally to hear speakers from WIRES, the Nature Conservation Council, the Greens and park rangers explain the problems that will be created by the legislation.

Other Issues

We acknowledge that the NSW State Government budget is currently under pressure but the environment seems to be bearing a disproportionate share of the budget cuts. In addition the Government has been going against previous policy statements and appears to be hell bent on encouraging development at the expense of many hard won environmental improvements. Examples are the current enquiries into the land clearing policies and the management of public land. Mining development is being facilitated while prime agricultural land and water supply is being jeopardized with inadequate research of potential impacts. Short term pressures and interest groups seem to be dictating Government action, rather than sound long term policy.

Funding for bush regeneration projects and national park management has been cut significantly, particularly in Lane Cove where the last two years of rain have exacerbated the problem of weed management. At the same time the Government is looking to increase revenue from conservation areas by encouraging the introduction of recreational pursuits such as mountain bike riding, horse riding, commercial and educational ventures. Of particular concern is the possibility of converting part of Stringy Bark Ridge in the newly declared Berowra Valley National Park into an area of public playing fields despite there being limited road access and being located in an area containing high quality regenerated bushland.

The Year Ahead

We see the major issue for 2013 will be the finalisation of the State Government's new planning legislation that will have long term significance for the future development of our urban and regional environments. The Green Paper that outlined the principles of operation of the proposed new system has caused much concern because of the decision to eliminate any meaningful community consultation once the strategic development plans for an area have been finalized. There is scant regard to the environmental protection measures that are essential to ensure that quality bushland and agricultural land is maintained.

STEP made a lengthy and detailed submission on the Green Paper and will examine closely

the proposed details of the legislation that will be released in the White Paper during 2013. We are also working with a confederation of local community groups called the Better Planning Network that is sharing resources and ideas to combat the shortcomings of the proposals.

Conclusion

Thanks to our members for your support and participation in our activities. The past year has demonstrated the achievements that can come from working together as a community. We hope, with your active support, to continue to make positive progress in the next year.

News and Updates

Lane Cove National Park Plan of Management

The National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 requires that a Plan of Management (PoM) be prepared for each national park. A PoM is a legal document that outlines how the area will be managed and what may or may not take place in the national park.

The current Lane Cove National Park PoM is dated August 1998 and is therefore over 14 years old. It is well overdue for review given the changes that have been made to the park such as significant additions of land areas.

A draft PoM has just been released. To access a copy of the plan go to:
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/parkmanagement/ParkManagementPlans.htm>

Comments may be submitted before 4 February 2013 by post to:
The Planner
Lane Cove National Park
Lady Game Drive
Chatswood West 2067
Or email:
lanecove.pom@environment.nsw.gov.au

STEP will be making a submission on this important document. The continuation of good management of the park is vital for an area with high ecological values that is subject to pressures caused by its surroundings of suburban areas.

Ku-ring-gai Council Rezoning of Community Land

STEP is opposed to the recategorisation and rezoning for sale of the Council owned land at 90 Babbage Road, Roseville Chase and 4 Binalong Street, West Pymble. The changed

use of the land in our view would lead in the long term to significant adverse environmental impacts on the sites and would not be in the public interest. Our submission is on our website.

South Turramurra Former B2 Corridor Development

Ku-ring-gai Council has released a Development Application for the sub-division of land that was previously part of the abandoned B2 road corridor to link the F3 and M2 motorways.

STEP has made a submission with suggestions to improve the environmental management of the riparian and wetland zone and stormwater flows. This submission is on our website.

NSW Government's Planning Review

The Minister for Planning's Foreword to the Green Paper on a new planning system for NSW released in July 2012 states that the intention of the new system is to establish "*A planning system that places people and their choices at the heart of planning decisions about their future.*"

STEP has serious doubts about the ability of the proposals to achieve this intention. Our submission on the Green Paper is on the next page. More specific comments that were attached to our submission are available on our website.

STEP has joined the Better Planning Network, a network of over 40 community groups that have combined to share their concerns about the proposals. The Better Planning Network was initiated by the Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society.

STEP Submission on the Planning Review Green Paper

14 September 2012

New Planning System Team
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39, Sydney 2001
<http://haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/newplanningsystem?module=form#tool>

NSW Green Paper – A new planning system for NSW.

STEP Inc is a local community based environmental group, with a membership of over 400 in the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai area. Our aim is to preserve natural bushland and native vegetation from alienation and degradation.

STEP is a member of the *Better Planning Network*, which is a network of non political community organisations striving to achieve a better planning system for New South Wales. STEP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Green Paper – A new planning system for NSW*

STEP is encouraged by the NSW Government's commitment to planning reform and we acknowledge the time and effort which has gone into producing the Green Paper. However, after reviewing the Green Paper and after consultation with other community groups, it is STEP's view that the proposed new planning system in its present form:

- Is seriously flawed and undermines many of the essential environmental protection mechanisms that have been developed over decades.
- Entrenches many of the undesirable features of the previous planning system.
- Denies people their basic democratic rights to have a meaningful say in determining the future of their area and ultimately is not in the public interest.

STEP has long been a supporter of the NSW Government's State Plan goal, which is to restore public trust and integrity to the planning system. We are therefore disappointed that the Green Paper, in our view, fails to provide a framework for execution that will ensure that its strategic objectives are delivered in practice. Our general and specific comments supporting our view are contained below.

1. General Comments on *Green Paper*

Successful strategy is ultimately totally dependant upon successful execution and STEP believes that many of the proposals in the Green Paper will operate to prevent, rather than promote, a return of public trust and integrity to our planning system. For example:

A. Community engagement.

STEP believes that full community engagement in decision-making at every stage of the planning and development process is essential

The opportunity for community input into decision-making must be available at both the early strategic planning phase and when individual developments are being assessed. It is the STEP view that the current *Green Paper* proposals effectively act to sideline the community over the full cycle of the of the planning and execution process.

Governments must allow sufficient time, effort, trained staff and funding to ensure informed, genuine and best practice community engagement. Every resident must be directly informed about the likely impact(s) of a plan or development application on their property and surrounds.

The use of code assessment, while sometimes appropriate, must be limited to genuinely low risk and low impact development, while merit appeal rights, including from third party objectors, must be available for all state significant development and infrastructure.

There must be a mechanism for the regular review of strategic plans, including informed and genuine community engagement in decision-making. This must include an opportunity for local communities to be engaged in the review of existing local environment plans.

B. Protection of our natural and cultural heritage.

STEP has stressed in its earlier submission to the Planning System Review (dated 4 November 2011) that ecologically sustainable development (ESD), not economic development, must be the key driver of all planning and development in NSW.

Environmentally-sensitive areas and cultural heritage must be identified and protected at the early strategic stage and the challenges of climate change must be addressed. This includes the proper protection and enhancement of green corridors and ensuring that prime agricultural land and catchment areas are out of bounds to development, coal seam gas exploration and minerals extraction.

STEP believes that the Green Paper should ensure that existing environmental protections, including those contained within State Environment Planning Policies (SEPP's), be retained and strengthened, rather than dismantled. It is also important that the requirement for concurrence by agencies responsible for environment and heritage protection must not be removed from individual projects.

C. Strategic planning must be evidence-based.

STEP believes that any new planning system must be based upon sound evidence based strategic planning principles. There must be a clear link and consistency between planning decisions at state, regional and local levels and the relevant environmental, social and economic data that support this must be readily available to the public. It is important that persons preparing studies for a purpose under the Planning Act must be professionally accredited not engaged by vested interests and subject to penalties if they provide misleading or false information.

Basic to any such planning process should be the concept that there cannot be infinite growth in a finite world. Any decision to increase Sydney's population must be based on environmental, social and economic studies that fully explore the benefits and disadvantages of population growth and housing targets. Permanent legislated limits to urban growth may need to be considered and implemented.

Once strategic plans are finalised, developers must not have the right to request 'spot-re-zonings' or propose developments that go beyond what has been agreed. Robust systems should also be put into place to ensure that all certifiers dutifully comply with all specifications and requirements. There should be adequate appeal mechanisms available against their decisions and penalties imposed for infringement of duty requirements.

D. Regional Planning Boards

The setting of zones in Local Plans has traditionally been carried out by Local Councils in close consultation with their communities. STEP believes the proposal to transfer this function to Regional Planning Boards is a serious backward step and that it is best retained by Local Councils. Land zones have a strong influence on the character and function of local areas and can have wide ranging impacts on local communities. For this reason zoning needs to be done in close association with the community likely to be affected. Local Councils are best served to carry out and be accountable for this function as they are democratically elected to serve the interests of the local community. Regional Planning Boards are too remote from the local communities affected, lack detailed knowledge of the local needs and sensitivities of the area and lack accountability to those communities regarding outcomes.

E. Sustainable development ?

STEP believes, when determining areas for urban consolidation and building intensity at a metropolitan level, whole of lifetime management including urban renewal capability without the economic distortion associated with growth and further intensification needs to be considered. If current urban consolidation requires a minimum height and building size for development viability then when the new high density buildings age and require renewal will even more intense development also be required for viability? At some stage when the intensification cycle is no longer possible then what are the consequences? Importantly, if major areas of a city suffer from this problem, what will be the consequences? There needs to be recognised limits to urban consolidation otherwise we risk creating in the long term urban slums and wastelands.

Yours faithfully

Rebuilding an Environmentally Friendly Community Church and Multi-function Centre

For many years STEP has been holding talks in the hall of St Andrews Church in South Turramurra. STEP life member, Margaret Booth describes the rebuilding of the church.

Over three years ago, St Andrews Uniting Church in South Turramurra, our well-loved A-frame church, was burned to the ground by a teenage arsonist and his two mates. What to do?

We formed a building committee and with input from the congregation and community, worked our way over two laborious years through choosing an architect, wrestling with Church authorities and the insurance company, then another year with tendering and building.

We chose Michael Sandberg as our architect. He has presented us with a modern multi-function building with very appealing curved walls, which gives a feeling of being held in the hands of God.

Our new building had to be accessible for the disabled so extra work went in to the new toilet block, ramps and accessible surfaces.

The building has extra piers for earthquake protection and the concrete slab was on flat ground so excavation was minimal. The old building had asbestos, the new has none.

A major requirement was that the acoustics must sound good for un-amplified piano music, small groups and such. This has been well achieved and it is great to get away from blaring microphones and hear "real" sound. The grand piano sounds wonderful. There is a moveable acoustic partition that allows the space to be split into two, enabling two activities at the one time.

Michael spent some time in the beginning absorbing the context and colours of the site. He chose bricks that perfectly capture the colour of the tree bark through the windows. (Oh that some of the developers along the highway would do the same!)

The high, full-length windows capture the light really well, greatly cutting down the need for artificial lighting. Eight glazed doors at the eastern end let in wonderful light as does the fully-glazed northern entry. The trees through the windows look as good as stained glass. We also have the blue of the sky in our glazed feature bricks and fire is represented by the red chairs and the cross made from the blackened beams of the lost church.

At the entrance, we have a striking remembrance of our old A-frame. So history is woven into the structure.

All lighting is low-energy elements such as L.E.D. There is some external lighting, all movement-sensitive and the bollards, necessary for disabled and general night safety, are also triggered by sensors.

There is no powered air-conditioning. Under-floor heating warms us in winter and does not need to be continually on as the floor stores the heat. The two halves of the space are independently heated so energy is not wasted when only one half is in use.

For the hot days, we have electronically operated louvres in the centre of the high windows and at the western and eastern ends with fans to push the hot air out.

Solar panels may be installed at a later date but the funds did not stretch to it at this time.

Underneath the pavers outside, are three 5,000 litre tanks giving us 15,000 litres of water from the roofs for gardening and toilets and relieving the pressure on Council's stormwater systems. The toilets save energy by having cold water only and waterless urinals.



Outside we were able to re-use the metal fences. Only one native tree was removed and, to avoid damage to the root system of another, the alignment of the low retaining wall was significantly amended. Landscaping uses a high proportion of native species. We are mindful of this being the edge of the nearby Duffy's Forest Endangered Ecological Community.

We were saddened by the loss of our old Church but are looking forward to the opportunities a new building will bring to us and the community.

Sydney's Transport, a Short-sighted Vision

The report released by Infrastructure NSW making recommendations for Sydney's transport development over the next 20 years has caused much despair amongst people who want a long term vision for a sustainable city. The following article written by Paul Barry for Crikey.com exemplifies our frustration

If you've ever raged at the jams on Sydney's Parramatta Road in the morning, or sat for hours in Melbourne's biggest bottlenecks, you'll know that one of the great curses of modern life is traffic. And to judge by yesterday's long-awaited report from Infrastructure NSW, those jams (and your daily rant) can only get worse.

The biggest giveaway in a new report from chairman Nick Greiner -- who The Power Index named as the most powerful man in Sydney 12 months ago -- is a graphic explaining how Sydney's transport system will cope in 2031, when another 1.5 million people will take an extra 2.7 million trips every day. The answer is that 2.3 million of these new trips will be made by car, while only 121,000 of them will be made by bus and 326,000 by rail or light rail.

In other words, chairman Greiner's "vision" of the future is that cars will continue to make up for nine out of 10 trips that we make. Worse still, freight traffic from Sydney's Port Botany is going to almost triple by 2031. And guess where all that's going to go too? Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by this world view, given the former Liberal premier is the man who introduced toll roads to NSW and is chairman of Bilfinger Berger, which built the M2, M7 and Anzac road bridge. But surely there must be a better way?

The report's foreword reminds us that Infrastructure NSW was set up in July 2011 to give us "world's best practice" in transport planning and delivery. But you don't need to venture far outside Australia to know that's a joke.

I'm no transport economist, but I am currently staying in France in a city called Rennes, and it's blindingly obvious from here that the French have something to teach us about transport and the quality of urban life.

Rennes is a city of 210,000 people, with another 270,000 in the outlying area. Yet it has a metro with 15 stations and almost 10 kilometres of track. It also has bike lanes throughout the city and a brilliant bicycle scheme where you can hop on a bike in one part of town and dump it in another, at any one of 83 stations. And its magnificent 15th-century centre -- which is about the size of Sydney's CBD -- is almost entirely free of traffic. Its bus service is also fantastic, and linked to the metro, physically and in its fare structure. Consequently, it is a delightful place to live.

The Rennes metro was built in 2002, and is about to double in size. So far it has cost about \$650 million, which is cheap as chips. With the \$70 billion that NSW spent on infrastructure between 2006 and 2011, the state could have bought more than 100 of these.



Now, building a metro in Rennes is obviously a different proposition to building one in Sydney or Melbourne, but it's too easy to just dismiss it like that, because almost every self-respecting city in the world now has one. Turkey can claim five cities with rapid-transit metro systems; Brazil has seven; France has eight; the US (king of the car lovers) has 15; China has 16. Even Armenia, Algeria and Azerbaijan have one, as does Kazakhstan. In fact, there are at least 160 metro systems around the world, of which more than 40 have been built since 2000. But there are none in Australia.

But it's not just Rennes and its metro that puts Sydney to shame. From here to Paris is about 350 kilometres, or four hours by car, but you can get there on the TGV in just over two. That's less than half the time it takes to get from Sydney to Canberra by train (which is a similar distance), and at least half an hour less than from Sydney to Newcastle, which is only about half as far.

Next year the journey time from Rennes to Paris will be down to 90 minutes, or 10 minutes less than it takes Country Link's locomotive to crawl from Sydney to Wollongong, about one quarter of the distance. It will also be less than half the time that V/Line's super-fast XPT currently takes to get from Melbourne to Wodonga.

As to when Infrastructure NSW sees journey times to Wollongong and Newcastle coming down, it's somewhere between five and 20 years, but there's not much detail on how it's

going to be done. It's clearly not one of the top priorities.

Looking further afield, you can get from Paris to London by train in two-and-a-half hours. And you'll find another big city whose transport system puts Sydney and Melbourne to shame. When I lived in London 25 years ago it had appalling traffic problems -- at least as bad as Sydney's today -- but congestion charging has cut the number of cars in the city centre by about 30% since 2003 and increased the number of trips taken on public transport.

The London Underground is also a delight. You can go 15 kilometres across town from Kings Cross to Brixton in about 15 minutes -- travelling three times the distance from Randwick to Rozelle in Sydney in a third of the time. You can also jump from bus to tube and back to bus again without paying three fares, thanks to the integrated Oyster card, which also

charges you less in off-peak periods. Simple, effective and incredibly convenient.

So why can't Australia have something like that?

Sydney has been promised a smart card for buses, trains and ferries since 1996, since when hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted. The latest incarnation, the Opal Card, is due to be rolled out by 2014. Apparently it's "still in the critical design phase".

Meanwhile, according to Infrastructure NSW, we put up with congestion on the Eastern Distributor, M4 and M5 East for 13 hours a day, while paying hefty tolls in the process. And what's the answer to this? Build more roads.

Is that "vision"? Is that "world's best practice"? Is that the way to get the brightest and best to come and live in Australia? Most of all, was it really worth waiting a year for?

High Speed Rail – Can it happen?

Proposals have been made for high speed rail along the east coast since the 1980's but we seem to be incapable of developing projects that require a long term vision. This article, written by Ian F. Bell and published in the Central Coast Business Review magazine, demonstrates that it can be done.

The Federal Government released its document "High Speed Rail Study -Phase 1" in July last year and is now well into the Phase 2 study, which will advise it on financial viability, amongst other things.

Just what does the Government mean by High Speed Rail (or HSR), and can it happen between Newcastle & Sydney, to benefit both the Central Coast & the Hunter region?

HSR means train travel, potentially, at 350km per hour, or faster. The Federal Government study only envisaged "wheel on rail" technology - being fast, sleek, but otherwise conventional looking trains which are "electrically powered for a quiet and sustainable journey" and run on steel rails.

The HSR under study is the latest technology from around the world in the "wheel on rails" category. In Japan this means the latest evolution of the Shinkansen, or bullet train, which they have had for 50 years. In France it means the 30 year old TGV's latest variant, the AGV. Spain (AVE) and Germany (ICE) have their own versions. Italy has recently got into the act, Taiwan as well, and now South Korea. Since 2007 China has outdone everyone with its massive, rapidly built, network of HSR lines, including the Beijing to Shanghai line which covers over 1300km (about the distance from Brisbane to Albury) in under 5 hours. UK has a major HSR Two planned, to augment HSR One, which is the Eurostar cross-channel (i.e.,

tunnel UK to France) service. Only in the last few days, California has given the go ahead to its \$US 68 billion HSR project to connect up new HSR lines down the Central Valley to newly electrified rail in the San Francisco Bay area and to Los Angeles and further south, making a future possible in which travellers can transit from as far north as Sacramento or "Frisco" south to LA or as far as San Diego on HSR or very fast rail.

The Commonwealth Govt Study group said that a full distance Melbourne to Brisbane HSR service would cost as much as \$108 billion to build, at a 90% confidence level on their initial estimates (this is the way that Government entities are encouraged to express project cost estimates nowadays). Newcastle to Sydney would be \$18 billion and Newcastle to Brisbane around \$40 billion, with Sydney to Melbourne about \$50 billion - all very big numbers indeed. A host of different possible routes were included in the initial study and they narrowed these down to a smaller number of possibilities, the biggest remaining macro issues being whether to include Gold Coast and the coastal hugging route coming south from Brisbane, and also whether to go out of Sydney to Canberra via the Illawarra (for Wollongong) or via Campbelltown and the Southern Highlands. The terrain south of Sydney through the Illawarra has higher capital cost implications as does obtaining the corridor through the Gold Coast. Not surprisingly given the source of instruction for the study, the favoured routes

south go via Canberra whereas some previous very fast train proposals had bypassed Canberra on the way to Melbourne.

So, can we afford this? The answer to that lies in two parts - firstly our history of roads development, secondly the growth of our national savings through the superannuation system. We have been spending massive amounts of Government capital on the Hume & Pacific Highways for decades and we still aren't finished to dual carriageway standard, because we do everything incrementally, rather than in one big project. Yet, if one does some basic numbers using Sydney's most recent tollway, the M7, as a precedent, then a simple calculation is to extrapolate its \$2.3 billion cost (in 2007 dollars) for a 39.5km trip, to around a \$65 billion capital cost (in 2012 dollars) if we were to theoretically rebuild the 900km plus Pacific Highway to that standard - and that is not taking into account the more difficult terrain over the Hawkesbury, the Bulahdelah Ranges and the far north coast. So maybe NSW should establish a replacement value for the Hume & the Pacific before it judges the Commonwealth's figures for rail.

If those highways had been tolled throughout, investors would not be baulking at the HSR economics. For, if we took the toll rate per km on the M7 (approx. 18c/km, after the \$7.16 cap is applied) and charged that rate per km for the full distance from Sydney to either the southern or northern capital, then the full distance toll one way would be around \$150, before fuel costs, making rail look very competitive as a transport medium, even before counting its environmental and comfort benefits. [NOTE: The study predicts fares Melbourne-Brisbane one way of \$150 for Non-business and \$234 Business class, and Melbourne-Sydney is a little more than half this with Sydney-Brisbane a little below half]. Fares in the range \$150 to \$200 for Business class, for either Sydney-Melbourne or Sydney-Brisbane, are quite comparable with our currently competitive air fares after the introduction of discount airlines, but the train would be more comfortable and more work friendly (e.g., WiFi full distance is envisaged, and the seating is far more spacious & comfortable). Accordingly the study anticipates quite a shift in the behaviour of travellers, away from aviation onto rail, with the advent of the new technology, and this has already happened overseas.

The second major point regarding our country's ability to afford these costs is answered in part by reflecting that this is not so much cost as an investment. Our existing rail network up the Coast is nearly 125 years old, and even the new North West Rail link in Sydney is being designed to 100 year effective life standards. HSR should, if properly engineered, be a very long life asset for the country. So, in essence, it absolutely suits the growth of our superannuation system, where funds require long life assets that both protects them against long run inflation and provides a satisfactory long term return.

Our superannuation system currently holds total funds of just over \$1.3 trillion, and is projected to grow to \$3 trillion, then \$5 trillion, in the next two decades, and keep growing if we don't reverse the planned 12% super guarantee contribution rate. Currently the system has an asset allocation to long term infrastructure investments of (say) 5%, but industry experts say that could effectively rise to 15%, or even more, over the next 20 years. At that level, in 20 years time, the system would be able to increase its infrastructure investment a staggering twelve-fold from the current level, which in turn would make up a backlog of some \$300 billion in infrastructure investment (although the engineering profession, perhaps being a vested interest, says our true backlog is more than double that).

So it can be seen that a \$100 billion capital project spanning 15-20 years, as the study suggests, should not be beyond our national savings, and it would be an iconic thing, just like the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the 1930's and the Snowy Mountains scheme in the 1950's.

For the Central Coast and Hunter- Newcastle-Pt Stephens this is a golden, once in a century, opportunity. Our corridor seems to be the most viable stage to kick the project off. At the last Census, our combined population was nearly 24% of that in the Sydney basin - far greater than Canberra's. There are many economic benefits, and the growth of industries and the de-centralisation effect would only be part of that. Gosford and Newcastle could be totally revitalised by such a project.

Coastal Upland Swamps

Article by Dr John Martyn, STEP Committee Member and author of the Field Guide to the Bushland in the Lane Cove Valley.

On March 9th, the NSW Scientific Committee gazetted their determination of Coastal Upland Swamp in the Sydney Basin Bioregion as an

Endangered Ecological Community. Upland swamps are scattered across Sydney's fringing sandstone plateaus from the Blue Mountains to

the Illawarra, Woronora and Ku-ring-gai/Hornsby areas and have been the subject of more than one "endangered" determination, others include Newnes Plateau Shrub Swamp and Blue Mountains Swamps. The latter two are inland and at high elevation and it is the "coastal" form that is most relevant to our part of the world. It is a major category because it includes Maddens Plains between Waterfall and Wollongong, the largest area of upland swamp on the Australian mainland.

The gazettal

The gazettal lists around 75 plant species and describes the key features of the community, but it is a long and rather formal account and David Keith's much more readable description under Coastal Heath Swamps in his book *Ocean Shores to Desert Dunes* is highly recommended.

In this he states that up to 60 species per 10 square metre area have been found in this community, making it "the highest local plant diversity known for shrub-dominated vegetation anywhere in the world". The gazettal document states that the category is likely to include a total exceeding 200 vascular plant species. The document lists many names that have been used by numerous authors for different examples of the community, and to gather them all under one umbrella is a useful move.

Characteristic features

The locations and settings are topographically distinctive: upland swamps lie in the uppermost reaches of river systems in hollows and shallow valleys on gently undulating plateaus in areas where annual rainfall exceeds around 950 mm. They are sometimes called "hanging swamps" because one normally associates wetlands with coastal lowlands, dune swales or river flood plains. In fact the swamps are perched on ancient uplifted land surfaces and almost invariably the streams they feed plunge over waterfalls and rapids into deep valleys and gorges that were created by uplift-rejuvenated erosion.

If you view Maddens Plains on Google Earth you will see a strange vegetation pattern of treeless brownish green lobes and tongues enclosed or flanked by dense, dark-green thickets with very sharp boundaries. The dark, treed areas will include eucalypts but there is usually a fringing shrub belt of dense Proteaceae and sheoaks. This fringe can be impenetrable as can be seen on the ground at the more accessible Uloola Swamp in Royal National Park 2.5 km north-east of Waterfall, or at the Salvation Creek bridge near the West Head Road. Few if any trees grow in the swamps and they mainly consist of low to medium shrubs, sedges, rushes, grasses, plus tangled banks of coral fern almost impossible to walk through.

Not all swamps have sharply-defined margins. There are several upland swamps near Bundeena Drive in the Royal National Park, and one in particular next to the Mt Bass Trail is very accessible because it is fringed by an extensive apron of open, moist, florally diverse heathland rather than a solid wall of dense shrubbery.

The flora

The flora consists of numerous shrubs, herbs and grasses but no key eucalypt species unlike our more familiar local EECs and CEECs ^ there's no such-and-such blue gum or so-and-so stringybark. This makes it a challenge for the amateur because shrubs can be difficult to identify when not in flower; and grasses, rushes and sedges can be really hard! But the community has many distinctive features of its own.

If you view the flora listing at

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/determinations/coastaluplandswampfd.htm> you will see familiar names like *Banksia ericifolia* and *Epacris microphylla* (which are widespread and common across other communities) but there are many unfamiliar ones, and lots of less common plants that prefer wet feet as you would expect. Uloola Swamp and Salvation Creek for example carry dense tangles of coral fern (*Gleichenia microphylla*) peppered with swamp banksia (*Banksia robur*), pink swamp heath (*Sprengelia incarnata*), formidable clumps of saw sedge (*Gahnia sieberiana*) and at Salvation Creek the golden pea-flowered *Aotus ericoides* plus clumps of button grass (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*). On parts of the more open and accessible swamp along the Mt Bass Trail the pink swamp heath becomes a dominant species and forms beautiful, broad swathes of pink when flowering in August. You can also potter around the swamp fringes here and find numerous interesting plants, like the delicate vanilla plant (*Sowerbaea juncea*). Some of these may be unfamiliar and new to you.

Closer to home Salvation Creek on West Head Road is the nearest sizeable upland swamp to our home territory, but some pockets in the Lane Cove Valley almost qualify. The bushland around the waterfall, potholes and boardwalk of the STEP Track has moisture-loving species found on the EEC list: notably native broom (*Viminaria juncea*), *Dillwynia floribunda*, dagger hakea (*Hakea teretifolia*) and Christmas bells (*Blandfordia nobilis*) though some of them only show themselves in the years following a major bushfire. There are also lots of moisture-loving crimson bottlebrushes (*Callistemon citrinus*) though this isn't a listed species. However much of the upstream apron to this gentle little valley has been lost or altered by human activity and who knows what used to grow

there?

Moist, heath-like vegetation occupies sandstone benches along the Great North Walk below Koombalah Ave, South Turramurra, and the shallow valleys downslope from the Pennant Hills sports grounds. There are many other moist sandstone benches in the Lane Cove Valley and the gazettal document also mentions Lane Cove Council area as a location.

Why list upland swamp as an EEC?

Although the majority of upland swamps are protected to some degree by their locations in national park or under water catchment authority management, it is still nonetheless important and timely to upgrade the community's protection status. Upland swamps are the sponges and kidneys of the drainage systems, purifying the water and holding it in reserve through times of drought. A crystal-clear stream flows out of the swamp at Salvation Creek even in the driest weather conditions. Maddens Plains actually feeds directly into Cataract Dam, and many upland swamps in the Sydney Basin contribute to water storage.

The swamps at their best are unlike almost any other local plant community in the balance of

their species, and florally they can be about as diverse as it gets outside of tropical rainforest. They also cover a small total area compared with many other vegetation communities. But they also occupy habitable terrain of gentle slopes and sweeping views ^ some have already been lost or fragmented by housing and other land uses. Others, like those on the Woronora Plateau, have the potential to be undercut and damaged by longwall coal mining, and all can suffer dreadfully from high-frequency bushfires.



Picture taken at Salvation Creek features *Aotus ericoides*, *Banksia robur*, *Gahnia sieberiana* and *Gleichenis microphylla*

A Great North Walk Experience

STEP member Ann Stafford recently walked the full length of the Great North Walk from Sydney to Newcastle. This article describes her epic adventure that included unnerving experiences of nearby shooting activity in an area frequented by many walkers and campers.

In 2010 I mentioned to my eldest son that in 2012 I would be turning 50! I felt a need to mark that milestone somehow. I am not a party person, how else do you mark such an occasion? I mentioned to him that I had been toying with the idea of doing the Great North Walk, maybe that would be a fun way to celebrate. "Mum, you should do that, and I'll do it with you" he said "But we need to do the whole thing in one walk, no doing it in sections, or coming back home during the walk". "Err, OK, let's do it" I replied, not feeling entirely sure about what I was getting myself into.

Two years later, on the 16th June 2012, we set off, just the two of us, my fifteen year old son and myself. We walked from Sydney to Newcastle covering 250 kilometres in three weeks. We had one rest day, on my 50th birthday, which I spent checking and cleaning gear, well, I may have found some time to sip a glass of champagne, or two.

Preparation

Before this hike I had only ever been on one night hikes. This sort of long distance walking requires a lot of planning, research and

preparation. I spent six months buying gear, studying maps, planning food drops and training to improve my level of fitness.

You'll need some maps. In total there are sixteen topographical maps required to cover the entire GNW. Some of those maps have the tiniest section of track on them but you still need them so be prepared to buy the full set. The other resources we used were the wildwalk notes for the GNW (you can download these for free on the wildwalks website (www.wildwalks.com)). You will also need the Department of Primary Industries set of notes 'Great North Walk Discovery Kit' which you can order online at (http://www.lpma.nsw.gov.au/about_recreation/walking_tracks/great_north_walk)

Signage and track conditions

The signage along the track is generally good for most sections. A lot of new markers having been added since I last used some of these tracks. However, as with all bushwalks, you do need at least a basic level of navigational skills. We found the track to be generally in good condition but there are lots of creek crossings,

and scrambles over rocky sections, which are all part of the adventure.

I found the most difficult section to walk was Berowra Waters to Brooklyn, due to the steep terrain. If you can walk that section you can do the rest of the GNW. Part of the northern section is also challenging, from the Congewoi Valley trackhead to Freemans Waterhole, this section covers the Myall Range. You need to carry water for several days. There is no water available along the Myall Range so you need to be prepared to carry that extra weight. We carried a water filter with us but up on that ridgeline there is nothing to filter.

Food

There are a few stores along the way but there are generally not stocking light-weight hike foods. After doing a reconnoitre of the main re-stocking options we decided to make food drops at five locations along the track. We vacuum-sealed food portions and left our supply packages with people at a few predetermined accommodation stays. This system worked well but meant we were locked into a schedule or we would run out of food. Each supply drop contained 3 to 4 days of supplies.

Camping

The campsites are generally very basic bush camps. However, if you plan your walk stages carefully you might be able to avoid a lot of these by staying at B&B's, etc. We camped half of the time and stayed in accommodation the remainder of the nights. We used the stays in accommodation to catch up on gear maintenance, laundry and of course hot showers!



Evidence of shooting near the GNW

Safety

Along with all of the usual precautions on a bush walk, I would advise you to use extra

caution when you are covering the northern sections of the GNW. We were travelling as a pair, mother and son, which I suppose made us a little more vulnerable than most. There were many times when we were in the northern section (north of Yarramalong) where we really felt quite unsafe.

The majority of the campsites in the Northern section of the walk are not signposted at all. We know where the track goes and where the campsites are because they are noted on our maps. Recreational shooters on the other hand, would not be aware of the route of the track, they may not even notice or take note of the GNW markers and they wouldn't be aware of the locations of a lot of the campsites as they are not signposted.

There are people in the area shooting (whether they are supposed to be or not is irrelevant, they are out there). We heard shots both during daytime and at night. Along the Myall range there are road signs that have been shot at. Given the recent decision to open up some National Parks for controlled shooting I think this situation is about to worsen.

While in the Heaton Gap area we met a lovely pair of brothers, young guys in their late teens, who said they were from the Hornsby area. They told us they had caught the train from Hornsby, arriving at Teralba station in the early evening, and had decided to walk throughout the night. The next day, when we walked through the area they had just walked through at night, we found shotgun casings. The casings were actually on the GNW track inside the Sugarloaf Conservation area boundaries.

It is very unnerving when you are camped in the bush, in an unmarked camping area, and you can hear shots in the distance. The situation made for a few sleepless nights. I understand a lot of metro area National Parks are going to be excluded from the proposed controlled shooting areas. The fact is a lot of people are already shooting in some of these areas and if they think the laws are loosening around this activity they will only become more likely to do so.

Further info on walking the GNW

There has been a book on the GNW published recently titled "Australia's Best Walks - The Great North Walk" by Matt McClelland. If any of you are planning to walk the GNW end-to-end and would like to chat about your planning feel free to drop me an email and we can compare notes. If I can drag this 50 year old body with dodgy knees for the entire 250 kilometres I am sure all of you can do it too! Email: chrisandann@ozemail.com.au

Book Review

Janine Kitson has written the following review of the book by Sharyn Munro on the impact of coal mining, *Rich Land, Wasteland*. Pan Macmillan.



Sharyn Munro's book is about her journey around Australia talking to communities affected by coal and coal seam gas mining. The book's subtitle, *How Coal is Killing Australia*, is her response to Australia's resource boom.

Sharyn Munro avoids focusing on coal's contribution to climate change, because as she says, there are others who have written on this. Instead she focuses on coal mining's impact on health and well being, on rich agricultural land, on clean water, on natural areas, and the future.

The book is filled with many courageous individuals who oppose the invasion of coal and coal seam gas mining into their area. They witness the might of the mining companies who bully and divide their communities and pressure them to sell out. They talk about their feelings of hopelessness when faced with the legal powers that mining companies have to dispossess them, backed up by governments.

There are stories of broken people who feel defeated as their health suffers from breathing in the cancerous fine particle pollutants; as their children suffer from asthma; about their sleepless nights, kept awake by painful low frequency noise from neighbouring mines; about how they fear to go outdoors in case another orange toxic plume, from another mining explosion, blows across their property; and how they feel a sense of loss as they see their rural landscape transformed into an industrial wasteland.

Governments rave about Australia's wonderful mining boom and how it is keeping Australia rich. However, Sharyn Munro challenges this with questions, such as, if the coal industry is so profitable why do the NSW and Queensland governments claim they are so broke? What

happens after the coal and gas has been mined out? What do we do with the massive craters that can never be rehabilitated? Why are we allowing the profits to go offshore? What happens when we lose our highly productive agricultural land and face food shortages? What happens when we have permanently dewatered the aquifers, cracked the creeks, ruined the flood plains, polluted the rivers and destroyed the coral reefs?

"The economy is not the only aspect of Australia that needs to be healthy; what about its people, its air, its land and water, its food growing areas, its remnant natural heritage, its fast-diminishing unique plants and animals?" asks Sharyn Munro.

Sharyn Munro raises the alarm bell for the beautiful natural areas under threat from coal and coal seam gas mining are – the Gardens of Stone near Lithgow; the Leard Forest and the Pilliga in the Gunnehah/Narrabri area; the Great Barrier Reef north of Mackay where multi-cargo facilities are being planned to enclose 580 hectares of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area and dredge 22 hectares of its coral reefs; the rare and precious Bimblebox Nature Refuge in Queensland's Galilee Basin where despite the Federal Government spending \$300,000 to protect it, now gives it the green light to be mined to obliteration.

The mining boom has created a two speed economy that benefits some but robs towns, farms and local economies of labour. The locals cannot afford the high rents and resent the social dislocation of fly-in, fly-out workers. Even the coal miners suffer as they work inhuman 12 hour shifts to ensure the mines operate 24 hours a day. The battle between rural communities and multinational coal mining companies is likened to a battle between David and Goliath. However the farmers are fighting back. In 2011 they formed the *Lock the Gate Alliance* that is a national alliance of over 120 community, industry and environmental groups.

If you've ever wondered why some think coal is killing Australia – this book will tell you why.

This book is available from Federation Library

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STEP Information

STEP Matters: The editor of STEP Matters for this edition is Jill Green, 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 numbers of members we have, so please encourage your like-minded friends and neighbours to join.

The STEP Committee for 2012

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