

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 15th AGM, 14 OCTOBER 1993

This is my third and final report as President of STEP.

The Year's Activities

Your committee's work over the past year has, as usual, ranged over a wide range of issues. Committee members are involved with Ku-ring-gai's Bushland Management Working Party, the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, the Lane Cove Catchment Management Committee, the North Metropolitan District South East Advisory Committee of National Parks, the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists, the ACF and more. Of particular concern during the year has been the UTS access road, the Wildflower Garden wetland proposal, the Broadway Historic Park and urban consolidation. John Martyn's book *A Field Guide to the Upper Lane Cove Valley* is nearing printing and other projects are in hand. We have held three bushwalks and had three speakers, Hal Cogger on frogs and reptiles, Harold Spies on Fungi and tonight's on the environmental history of the Lane Cove Valley. Your Committee has attended to the usual large amount of correspondence and administrative matters. It is never completely fair to mention names but Sue Jones, Judy Meacham and Bruno Krockenburger deserve additional thanks for the fantastic work they have done in attending to all the details essential to the running of the organisation. I must thank them and the other committee members who have worked so hard to keep STEP operating efficiently and also those members who have supported us in various ways.

The Challenges Ahead

The wonderful thing about being involved with STEP now is being able to reap the benefits of the years of hard foundation work done by previous presidents and committees. These people brought STEP from its local beginnings to

be a respected force in Ku-ring-gai. Very few people have not now heard of us and our views are always considered in forums where it matters. Those who are to manage the organisation in the years ahead therefore have a responsibility to ensure that this position is maintained and enhanced. There are certainly no lack of issues and opportunities.

In this annual report I would prefer to look more at the issues ahead rather than the issues behind us.

I believe that the biggest mistake that the environment movement often makes is to concentrate on trench warfare with our opponents on an issue by issue basis rather than on outflanking them by looking ahead and appealing to the community on concepts based on the long term outcomes of our planning and actions. One result of this approach is that only issues which have long term consequences should have high priority. This is not to say that day to day issues should be ignored but that they should be seen for what they are and considered in proper context.

What then are the issues for the future? STEP's objective is to ensure that our urban environment is enhanced rather than degraded over time, that the features which we value are not taken from us under the banner of "progress" and that urban native bushland is valued for its own sake as well as for the pleasure which it gives to most.

The fact is that we are still faced with a future which is frightening. There is no doubt that very many in our community see our urban open space as an opportunity for development and believe that such development is inevitable. Others, including our governments, see our built environment as needing change - the concept of the quarter

acre block is challenged as selfish and out of step. We are told to consolidate ourselves and thus to forever change the nature of our urban environment.

The 20 Year View

If we succumb to these pressures what will the Ku-ring-gai area look like in only twenty years? For a start there will be two freeways in the Lane Cove Valley. The F-2 is almost with us and the F-3 extension is only on the back burner waiting for more favourable times for the proponents. The F-3 from Pearce's Corner to Ryde will traverse Wahroonga and Turramurra. South Turramurra will be cut in two, the Campbell Drive valley will resonate with noise and large areas of bushland will be lost and degraded. These freeways and the other roads will be filled with traffic from the North West Sector, the Central Coast and Northern Beaches developments. Urban consolidation will mean that most of our backyards will have new houses in them and that tree cover will be greatly reduced. Population increase in the order of 50% will mean that all our infrastructure, including open space, comes under ever increasing pressure. Mona Vale Road will look much like Pennant Hills Rd now does and getting to the beach will be more trouble than it is worth. The proponents of this variety of progress will then be able to tell us that the area needs more roads, sewers, sporting fields, shopping centres and schools and Ku-ring-gai will be just another urban disaster in the image of so many other urban mistakes around the world.

In my view this describes the challenge that STEP faces in the future. The enormous shift in community attitudes towards our point of view over the last 10 years must give us hope that as much again can be achieved in the next 10

John Burke, October 1993.