

# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No.94 Feb 1999

## COMING EVENTS

### CLEAN-UP AUSTRALIA DAY-- Sunday 7th March, 1999.

STEP will once again participate with a site at the corner of Kissing Point Rd. and Vernon St., South Turrumurra, from which we will endeavour to cover most locations in South Turrumurra.

Jennifer Schwarz will be the person in charge, with John Martyn helping to pinpoint trouble spots. However we also look to people to nominate locations which need attention, which might have escaped John's eagle eyes.

Come and join us in this worthwhile exercise in cleaning up our environment, bring the kids and your friends, report to the site, collect your bags and directions and have a great day while you are helping your community.

Ku-ring-gai Council will again be providing the dumpster and deal with its disposal.

### STEP/Pam Morse grants

The grants to tertiary students, commenced last year and financed from the proceeds of the Pam Morse bequest fund, will again be made available this year.

The scheme will be publicised in the metropolitan campuses again.

Three grants were made last year, since applications were judged to be of sufficient standard and interest to warrant three rather than just one.

An abbreviated version of the report submitted by one of the grantees, Elisabeth Watson is reproduced in the following pages of this newsletter

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### STEP MAP

Work on the STEP map is progressing as planned. Checking of the tracks is continuing, approximately 60% having been completed. The volunteers under John Martyn's direction have been doing a marvellous job to cover such a major portion of the area to date.



The tracks in the lower part of the valley, extending down to Tambourine Bay, almost in Sydney Harbour, tend to be relatively simple in comparison with those in the upper part of the valley, but they still need to be checked, and that is still to be tackled.

The new map will be produced in collaboration with the Surveyor General's Department, as in the previous version.

The Department will provide contours at the chosen intervals of 4 metres together with the roads and boundaries information.

This will form the base onto which the walking tracks, as well as any other notation will be grafted.

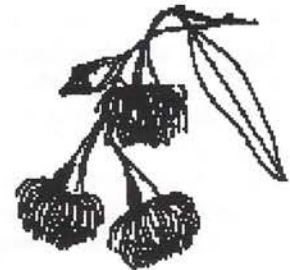
The whole process will be carried out in digital format, with John Martyn transferring the track information onto his computer and creating the digital file, which will then be transmitted to the Surveyor General's Department for final co-ordination and eventually printing. The map will be in full colour, will include some photographs of significant features and comments about such features and views.

Completion depends to a large extent, in the first instance, on John Martyn's availability to deal with the information gathering and transfer into digital format via his computer. The skills, the hardware and the software necessary for this task are concentrated in John's hands and his contribution is absolutely

central to the project.

We are very fortunate to have John willing to make himself available, and so enthusiastically committed, otherwise the task would be much more difficult.

Unfortunately it is also subject to the Surveyor General's Department and the printer's work schedules, but we are hoping to have it completed for a pre-Christmas 99 launch.



### NATIONAL HERITAGE TRUST

The STEP Committee decided to apply for a grant under the National Heritage Trust.

There are a number of locations in the area, where action by community groups could make a beneficial impact on improving the environment.

It was decided that the residential interface with the valley's bushland in the Morona Ave. area of Wahroonga was a location where stormwater control would significantly improve weed invasion and other problems evident in that location.

Consequently an application has been lodged for a grant to enable this project to be tackled. The project would be supported and managed by Council with local and STEP volunteer input. The application will, of course be competing for funds with the many other projects for which applications have been submitted to the National Heritage Trust. An extensive assessment and recommendation process precedes any NHT decision. If we are successful with our application, we will report on the project in detail.



#### **THE 10/20 YEAR PLAN**

Ku-ring-gai Council has issued a discussion paper entitled the 10/20 Year Strategic Plan on which it has invited comment from the community.

John Burke, past president of STEP, has submitted a detailed contribution, of which we reprint an edited version here, since it is a subject of great importance to Ku-ring-gai and John's contribution encapsulates STEP's past and present position.

*"It is imperative that we put...managing the Municipality into the context (of) a process of change that started about 200 years ago. There should therefore be (a view) which puts previous changes into historical context (and) looks ahead at (how) we would like to see (it) in another 50, 100 or 200 years and test proposals for compliance with this vision.*

#### **i) Reversible and Irreversible Change**

*We must separate (decisions) into those which are able to be reversed,*

*if...ill advised, and those which are not able to be reversed.*

*e.g. the former: methods of disposing waste etc...*

*e.g. the latter: the loss of bushland to development...*

#### **ii) The Tyranny of Small Decisions**

*One ingredient missing from much of the decision making process in Ku-ring-gai (and elsewhere, Ed.) has been an appreciation that most of the major changes which have occurred have been the cumulative outcome of many individual small decisions. Many, reasonable and equitable against short term criteria, are unreasonable and inequitable when their place in the process of change is assessed.*

*(For) example the alienation of bushland, bit by bit as playing fields have been constructed, roads realigned (as on Arterial Rd.), and Crown land developed. Decisions which are individually reasonable but which contribute to the loss, at say, 0.5% p.a. will see all remaining bushland gone in 200 years.*

*Bushland is important from a planning point of view because it is a very good example of a non-renewable resource. Many of us do not think about bushland, frequently we take it for granted like air to breathe and water to drink. Thus when a little disappears we often do not react. Take it all away, however, and we would all suffer a great sense of loss.*

#### **iii) The Problem of Precedents**

*Applicants for projects naturally seek respectability and validity for their project (from) previous developments.*

*Traditional process and institutions (Courts) reinforce this without going back to examine whether existing uses are valid in terms of current standards.*

*The (Mona Vale) corridor has been subject to a process of change which has gradually altered its character. Had it not been for community action over the past 15 years many*

*of the proposals, for a crematorium, for a bus depot etc, ...would have proceeded and the corridor would have been well on the way to being a commercial strip.*

*Changing previous mistakes is very difficult.*

*We give unreasonable weight to precedent when considering the future, and thus make inequitable decisions as far as the future generations are concerned.*

#### **HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT**

*Much of the discussion about the type and density of housing has been politically driven (to) grapple with urban sprawl, generally federal or State matters, and Councils have felt helpless.*

*Instances of coercion by State Government abound.*

*One difficulty underlying all of this is that Ku-ring-gai has not had in place its own arguments and policies dealing with these issues. Its objections have therefore been characterised as representing the protection of entrenched privilege for an elite few.*

*..But (things) have begun to change... (from every call for a national population policy being suspected of a racist agenda) and... we can now perhaps begin to confront the issues.. (of a national population policy) without fear of being stigmatised.*

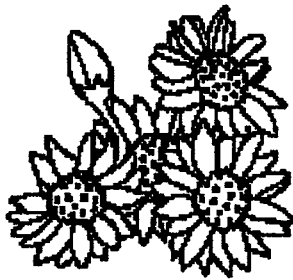
*The task for Ku-ring-gai is to look at the effects (of) Government policies over a far longer time span than the 10 to 20 years (of the) Strategic Plan.*

*(They) will produce a doubling in population every 65 years. Thus, should we be planning for 200,000 people within 100 years?*

***Residents and government should be brought face to face with the future which current policies will deliver.***

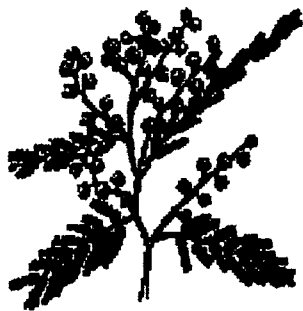
*Unless the population of Sydney can be stabilised, there will be high rise high density development from the beaches to the mountains within 100 years. There will be no bushland, and the typically*

*Australian environment of Ku-ring-gai will disappear. More specifically, it will be impossible to achieve key outcomes of the Strategic Plan unless government pressure referred to is neutralised.*



### **BUSHLAND**

*Ku-ring-gai has an enviable record in bushland management and in many respects has been a national leader in this area. There is, however, a long way to go, (while) we still have Council sports fields polluting surrounding bushland, and road maintenance activities damaging bushland, and we are devoting scant resources to the rectification of past mistakes. We must recognise that population increases will damage bushland in many ways and will eventually claim all remaining bushland if perpetual increase, as advocated by our Governments, (is pursued). We have already put a road, the F3, through a national park and our other bushland (has less protection) and will succumb more easily when pressure is brought to bear.*



### **AN AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK**

*It is impossible to legislate for... culture, pride or "the Australian*

*way", but it is possible to (legislate to protect) those characteristics which (define) Australian physical landscape, rather than treat it as if it was of little value.*

*It is also fashionable to disparage the quarter acre block, backyard cricket and barbecue (which are the basis of Ku-ring-gai's tree canopy). Council should develop arguments to support these informal institutions and culture (rather than be accused of selfish space use). (This is therefore a plea) to add another dimension to the Strategic Plan.*

*That extra dimension is the putting of every planning issue into the context of the process of change that is occurring within Ku-ring-gai so that the medium and long term consequences are (required to be) accounted for.*



### **URBAN BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT, an Assessment of SEPP19**

by Elisabeth Watson, School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UNSW.  
(An edited version of the report resulting from a STEP/Morse grant) *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 19 (SEPP 19) is a legally binding instrument under the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, which applies to urban bushland on land zoned or reserved for public open space in local Government areas of Sydney and the Central Coast. National Parks, nature reserves, State recreation areas and State forests are not covered by it.*

*The general aim is to protect and preserve bushland because of its natural heritage value, its aesthetic value and its value as a recreational, educational and scientific resource. More specific aims include protection of fauna, flora, habitats, existing landforms, geological formations and promotion of bushland management.*

*The policy encourages, but does not require, Councils to prepare plans of management for bushland, by which they can deal with the causes and effects of adverse impacts and also enable the rehabilitation and conservation of historic, scenic, recreational, scientific and natural values.*

*A case study of a bushland site at Allambie Heights demonstrates the application of SEPP 19 and also demonstrates its weaknesses. After several attempts, a proponent was successful in receiving approval through an appeal to the L&E Court for an access through adjacent Crown land, zoned public open space, to its development site. The principal weakness is that SEPP 19 contains terms such as "satisfied", "essential", "public interest" and "no reasonable alternative", which allows the consent authority great discretion in their interpretation.*

*SEPP 19 also has no effect on privately held bushland.*

*This gives rise to several recommendations:*

*The policy needs to be extended to bushland in all NSW local Government areas.*

*Its application should be extended to privately held bushland.*

*Its implementation should be coordinated at regional and State levels through the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.*

*It should be amended to specify clear guidelines to limit the discretionary powers of the consent authority.*

*It should be amended to require plans of management to be prepared for publicly owned bushland and for all remnants forming linking corridors to other bushland.*

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**Henry Fairlie-Cuninghame**

It is with sadness that we record the passing of Sir William Henry Fairlie-Cuninghame, Bt., known to his friends as Henry.

Henry was a long time member of STEP, together with his wife Janet. He was a keen outdoors person, who delighted in roaming the forests and mountains and in showing others the wonders of nature.

He was a foundation member of the National Parks Association and he frequently acted as guide on NPA bushwalks, where he transmitted his enthusiasm to the participants. He was also a life member of the Australian Conservation Foundation, which he had supported since 1966.

We extend condolences, on behalf of all STEP members, to Janet and Robert.

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**LANE COVE NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT**

Following the meeting of STEP Committee members with the Mayor, General Manager and the Director of Open Space Services, reported in the last newsletter, Council initiated correspondence with NPWS with the purpose of defining management responsibilities, finance and vital aspects of ownership.

Council stated that it was supportive of a consistent approach to managing all public land in the Lane Cove Valley, and was still interested in supporting that overall

objective. Council also requested a specific proposal so that Council could gain a full understanding and give proper consideration to the matter. Council has unfortunately received no such proposal to date, but has received a letter from John Watkins, MP, who was the instigator of the concept in the first instance, restating the basic assurance of cooperation to reach a formal understanding to deal with these matters. The current election climate is probably not conducive to progress and the matter needs to be pursued after the election. Ku-ring-gai has, as explained by the Director of Open Space Services, ownership responsibilities which differ from those of other Councils in the area, and therefore requires a different approach to the problem. STEP will continue to seek ways to progress the project.

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**INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF OLDER PERSONS**

Our attention has been drawn to the UN General Assembly's declaration of 1999 as the Year of Older Persons.

Not that we believe that STEP members are all "Older Persons", but the IYOP Secretariat in NSW is currently developing a project to boost the involvement of older people in volunteering around environmental issues. Initially it seeks to identify environmental opportunities for volunteering, with the longer term development of a network of older persons similar to the Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement (EASI) in the USA, which links volunteer resources with projects in the community.

As STEP does not have any programs as an organisation, we leave it to individuals who may wish to pursue the matter. Contact Kim Chard on ph. (02) 9237 6611, fax (02) 9364 6923, or e-mail kim.chard@add.nsw.gov.au

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**KU-RING-GAI WILDFLOWER GARDEN**

The Australian Plants Society (North Shore Group) runs a series of talks and walks at the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, at 420 Mona Vale Rd., St. Ives.

The talks start at 10.00 am at the Visitor Centre and are followed by an easy walk in the garden to look at the plants. The walk concludes at 12.00 noon. Information sheets are provided. There is a fee of \$2 to cover costs, but people attending the talks are admitted free to the Wildflower Garden.

*Autumn Walks*

- 9 March Parts of the Plant 1 (flower)
- 16 March Banksias
- 23 March Parts of the Plant 2 (fruit)
- 30 March The Plant Kingdom Winter Walks
- 20 April Propagation of Native Plants
- 27 April Inflorescences
- 4 May Parts of the Plant 3 (leaves)
- 11 May Identifying trees
- 18 May Geology of the area
- 25 May Plant Evolution
- 1 June Ferns
- 8 June Gymnosperms
- 15 June Rainforest
- 22 June Longer Walk (bring lunch)



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