



STEP Matters

Number 178 November 2014

With the end of 2014 fast approaching we wish you all a relaxing Christmas and New Year period with time to enjoy the great outdoors.

We look forward to a new year with an important state election. There are some promising signs that the politicians have been listening to the concerns of the community about coal seam gas mining. But the headlong development rush continues to the detriment of the environment and community wellbeing. At the federal level high population growth, the source of many of our problems, and the assault on the environment continue unabated.

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LOCAL COUNCIL AMALGAMATIONS

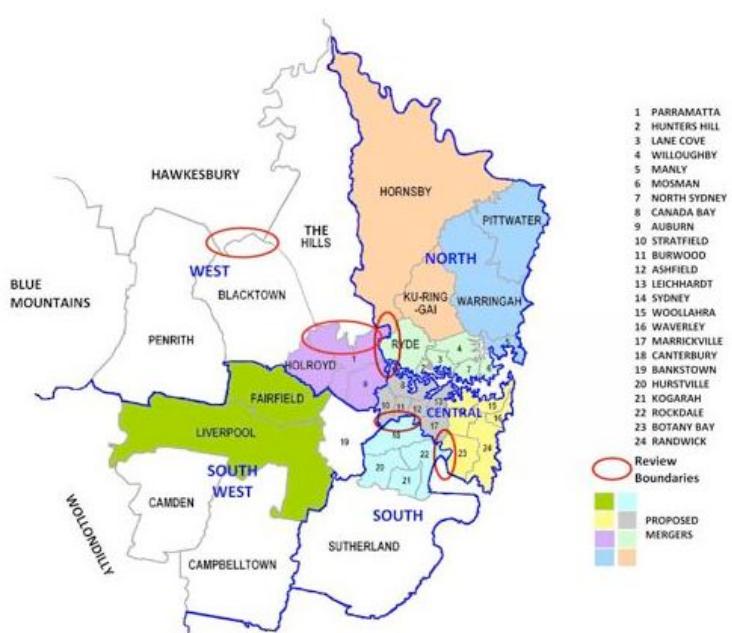
One issue in the 2015 NSW state election that could have a significant influence on the future development of NSW is the proposed restructuring of local government. The map shows the current proposal for council amalgamations.

The table gives the size of the current council areas in northern Sydney, the combined population of the amalgamated areas and the likely number of councillors from each area in the merged entity based on electoral size.

Council	Population in 2013 (ABS Series 3218.0)	Number of councillors [†]
Ku-ring-gai	119,000	4
Hornsby	167,000	6
Total	286,000	
North Sydney	69,000	2
Lane Cove	34,000	1
Willoughby	73,000	2
Mosman	29,000	1
Hunters Hill	14,000	1
2/3 Ryde*	75,333	3
Total	294,333	
Manly	44,000	2
Pittwater	62,000	2
Warringah	153,000	6
Total	259,000	

* Remainder of Ryde in Holroyd

† Assuming there are ten councillors for each merged entity and new electorates are based on population size



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Most councils have been critical of the proposed mergers. Of 41 Sydney metro councils only seven were assessed as having a weak financial performance. Size was not a significant factor, for example the very small Hunters Hill Council was not financially weak. Indeed small councils are often more accountable in their spending as their councillors can know in greater detail what is going on and they are more attune to their residents genuine needs. In any case financial performance is not the issue. After all financially weak councils can be placed under administration. The NSW Government has made it clear that Sydney metropolitan councils must demonstrate that they have the scale and capacity to deal with the consequences of the high population growth targets that have been set for their region and Greater Sydney.

The timetable for the amalgamation program is quite tight. Councils are required to lodge their submissions by 30 June 2015 (after the state election). These will be reviewed by a Minister's Advisory Committee that will make recommendations to the Minister by October 2015. New elections will be held for the amalgamated councils in September 2016.

Ku-ring-gai Council in a detailed report on the proposed merger with Hornsby (Council Meeting, 11 Nov, 2014, GB1) states:

... An amalgamation of Ku-ring-gai Council with Hornsby Council would expose Ku-ring-gai Council to a wide range of risks including reduced representation and less say in decision making for the local area ... (see the table above)

... The total residential land value in Ku-ring-gai is \$23.3b (for approx. 39,500 properties) while in Hornsby it is \$20.7b (for approx. 54,000 properties) ... Assuming the total rates raised for an amalgamated Council remained the same as the sum of the rates raised by the individual councils, preliminary calculations indicate that the rates for properties in the former area of Ku-ring-gai could increase by up to 17% in an amalgamation with Hornsby ... These additional rates would be more than double Ku-ring-gai Council's possible share of the hypothetical savings forecast by KPMG in an amalgamation with Hornsby ...

In an amalgamated Council the high land values in Ku-ring-gai would also mean that it would be a preferred area for further sales of Council-owned land to pay for the infrastructure upgrades needed with population growth.

Once the councils are merged their planning instruments will need to be replaced. More limiting criteria for environmentally protected land could see the release of significant areas of reserves for sale and urban development to help pay for new infrastructure and facilities.

Let us know your views

We will provide more commentary as the election date draws nearer. In the meantime, please contact us with answers to the following questions at secretary@step.org.au and let us know if you:

- **support** amalgamation (type **yca** in the subject line)
 - **do not support** amalgamation (type **nca** in the subject line)
1. Were you aware of the current NSW Government's program to abolish your council area?
 2. Would you like to have been informed?
 3. Is it an important issue for you?
 4. Do you believe that the mergers proposed will improve your area?
 5. Do you believe this should be an election issue?
 6. Should there be a referendum regarding council mergers?

END OF YEAR BARBECUE

Our end of year barbecue will be held on Sunday 14 December at Queen Elizabeth Reserve, Bradfield Road, West Lindfield. Starting time is 4.30 pm but we will get there earlier to reserve a barbecue.

If the weather is bad we will meet elsewhere and details will be posted on our website and on Facebook by 3 pm on the day.

This is a good opportunity to meet other STEP members and catch up on recent events.

In previous years we have held the barbecue behind Neroli and Harry Lock's home in Leuna Avenue, Wahroonga but sadly Neroli lost her long battle with cancer last month. Some details of the tremendous work she did for our local environment are given on page 7.

LOCAL NEWS

New Plant Species

A new species of *Hibbertia* has been discovered in Turramurra. Andrew Robinson, Bushland Officer at Ku-ring-gai Council realised the plant was different to the 50 other species found in NSW but had to wait until it flowered before he could instigate the intricate process involved in identification and recognition.



Photo: Wolter Peeters

The plant lives in light clay soil occurring on a shale sandstone soil transition. Since its identification other examples have been found in North Ryde and Cheltenham but it has been provisionally listed as critically endangered under the Threatened Species Act.

Andrew has given the plant a common name of Julian's Hibbertia, named in honour of Julian Poulton, a close bushwalking friend who died suddenly several years ago.

Canoon Road Netball Complex

Ku-ring-gai Council has recently held community consultations with local residents living near Canoon Road, South Turramurra about a revised plan of management. Feedback was invited but residents were given only a week to respond with a closing date of 24 November. However the Draft Plan of Management includes many areas that haven't been finalised and need to be investigated. Constructive comments could be considered by Council.

The most vexed issue as always is traffic and parking. The Netball Association has requested an additional 50 to 100 parking spaces to facilitate growth however the draft acknowledges there is limited room for such expansion under Council's obligations to protect the high-quality nearby bushland. Given that this problem is greatest on Saturday mornings for six months of the year it is unreasonable to allow an expansion of the complex. The netball clubs need to do more to use coordinated transport options such as carpooling or use of public transport.

The Canoon Road area is where STEP began in 1978 when locals tried to stop the development of this complex. It involved the destruction of high-quality bushland bordering the Lane Cove River Valley.

The Plan of Management acknowledges that this bushland has not been fully surveyed but is known to contain threatened species. A welcome recognition of an area that needs protection is the undefined boundaries of the car parking area south of the complex near the fire trail. Vehicles are pushing into bushland areas to park resulting in erosion, habitat loss and potential hazards for drivers. The Plan also proposes better management of drainage to reduce erosion and the overflow of storm water into the bushland below.

Significant numbers of established remnant trees exist across the site, however the nature of the highly used pedestrian site means that second generation trees have failed to establish. The Plan recommends investigating methods of establishing second generation trees to ensure that shade and biodiversity links are maintained in the future.

The documents are available at http://www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/Plans_regulations/General/Preliminary_draft_documents_for_Canoon_Road_Recreation_Area

St Ives Showground Precinct

In June 2010 Ku-ring-gai Council adopted an Options Paper, similar to a master plan, for the St Ives Showground and Precinct Lands and resolved to prepare a draft Plan of Management based on this Paper incorporating all sites within the precinct.

Now more than four years later, in the usual flurry of activity at the end of the year, Council has resolved to proceed with a similar management plan based on the same Options Paper.

St Ives Showground and precinct covers areas on two sides of Mona Vale Road, abutting Garigal National Park to the south-east and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park to the north-west including:

- Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden
- Ku-ring-gai Nursery
- St Ives Showground
- HART training facility site
- disused green waste tip

The plan defines the permitted and recommended uses that the Council may approve for all the areas covered. The plan will go on public exhibition for ten weeks and submissions will close around mid February (to be confirmed). STEP will be making a submission.

Aspects of particular interest to STEP are:

(1) Mini Wheels Training Club Track

The Mini Wheels Training Club has a lease on an area containing critically endangered Duffy's Forest vegetation whose survival is dependent on the right soil combination being maintained. The lease is due to expire in March 2016.

In April 2014 Council was made aware of an illegal importation of 700 tonnes of clay fill with the intention to address serious erosion issues and to camber tracks for safer riding.

The importation contravened the Protection of the Environment Operations Act and several conditions within the Licence Agreement. The lessee was ordered by Council to make the area good through staged rehabilitation supervised by Council staff. In October 2014 the site was reopened for use after inspection and clearance.

This incident and the view that this activity impeded the recovery of this sensitive area has led to Council not supporting the renewal of the Club's licence. STEP has opposed this use of the site for many years.

(2) Ku-ring-gai Nursery Unlikely to Survive

The Options Paper proposed to relocate the Ku-ring-gai Nursery to the green waste tip site. The Council has given the nursery very little staffing and financial support over the past few years so it comes as no surprise that their current position is that the nursery function is no longer viable and should be closed down. Instead Council proposes to operate a small retail nursery at the Wildflower Garden along with a small propagation and stock-holding area. This reduced function for the nursery could operate out of the existing site until an appropriate area is identified at the Wildflower Garden or until Council decides on the future use of the existing nursery site, whichever is the sooner.

STATE GOVERNMENT NEWS

Some good news before we move on to the bad news.

Gardens of Stone

In June Michael Keats presented a STEP talk on the outstanding pagoda and ecological features of the Gardens of Stone National Park and Ben Bullen State Forest. He explained the threats to this iconic area from a proposal by Coalpac Pty Ltd to expand its coal mine near Cullen Bullen.

The Planning Assessment Commission:

- rejected Coalpac's proposal to destroy more than 300 hectares of stone pagoda formations and forest because of 'unacceptable risks and impacts, and only limited short term benefits; and
- found the nearby pagoda rock formations are of 'high conservation value, both in terms of the unique landforms present and the key habitat features for threatened species'.

On 17 November Coalpac was placed in voluntary liquidation and confirmed that it would not appeal the decision. This removes the last hurdle stopping protection of these landforms by their inclusion in the national parks estate. We hope this occurs soon.

Additions to the National Parks Estate

On the eve of the World Parks Congress the Minister of the Environment announced some welcome additions to national parks. It seems hopes for a Sydney Harbour Marine Park will not be realised. NSW, with 9% of land area protected, is well behind the national average of 16%.

The most significant new national park is the Everlasting Swamp near Grafton. This area is one of NSW's largest remaining coastal floodplain wetlands. The national park will protect breeding habitat for nationally threatened and migratory species listed under international agreements.

Additions were also announced adding 3000 hectares to the Gwydir Wetlands Conservation Area that is part of the Murray Darling Basin and of some small areas to four other national parks and nature reserves.

Peat Island Overdevelopment: Missed Opportunity

Peat Island near Mooney Mooney was used as a hospital until 2009. The island can be seen from the M1 west of the Hawkesbury Bridge as you head north. The NSW Government wants to develop the island for housing and has announced plans for 450 houses including five storey buildings and shops with limited public waterfront access. The development is totally unsympathetic with the surrounding area of waterways fringed by dense bushland and colourful sandstone cliffs. The iconic view from the approaches to the river of national parks will be replaced with sound barrier fencing.

Instead of more housing with no public transport access, this area could become a public asset suitable for recreation and access to the Hawkesbury for all. With the waterfront views and being a long distance from employment, no doubt the development would be mostly week-enders not permanent housing.

Write to your MP to express your views and see www.peatisland.cen.org.au for more information.

STEP LECTURE: PROF EMMA JOHNSTON

About 80 people enjoyed a stimulating lecture given by Prof Emma Johnston on Sydney Harbour's biodiversity and threats. Emma is the Director of the Sydney Harbour Project at the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS).

Sydney Harbour has a unique environment because of the depth of its waters and its huge convoluted area with a multitude of bays. This means that a large proportion of the harbour is not flushed out by tidal movements and marine life has evolved within niche habitats. Hence Sydney Harbour is one of the most biologically diverse harbours in the world. It is home to over 570 species of fish (more than the UK or the whole of the Mediterranean Sea), 3600 invertebrates including dozens of Australian endemic species, and many thousands of species of, often unique, marine microbes.

Urbanisation and past industrial operations have placed great pressures on the health of the Harbour from heavy metal pollution, the invasion of degraded habitats by marine pests and the build-up of micro-plastics in sediments. Climate change will bring changes in the East Australian Current (which is making Sydney and eastern Australia, climate change 'hotspots') and will add significantly to the pressures upon the Harbour with as yet unknown consequences.

Emma explained that creating a marine park in Sydney Harbour will reduce these threats by creating a healthier ecosystem. You can show your support for a marine park via the website set up by the National Parks Association of NSW (www.sydneymarinepark.org.au).

Sydney Harbour Project

In response to the challenges highlighted by Emma, SIMS has initiated the Harbour Research Project to continue to enhance water quality in the Harbour, to characterise the biodiversity of species and habitats, to investigate functioning and resilience, to restore degraded habitats and to provide the scientific basis for management and policy decisions for the Harbour. This is a planned 5 year, \$10m flagship research program. There is lots of information on the SIMS website (<http://harbourprogram.sims.org.au>)

STEP is planning to organise a tour of the Interpretive Centre at SIMS in Mosman in early 2015.

WORLD PARKS CONGRESS

Helen Wortham and Jill Green volunteered on the National Parks Association stand one afternoon at the World Parks Congress held from 13 to 19 November at Sydney Olympic Park. This congress was organised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and is held only every ten years. Over 6000 delegates, including 30 environment ministers attended.

During the congress conservationists meet to review research, experience and progress in conserving natural areas and species and plan for the future. Many countries made significant commitments to increase conservation with the notable exception of Australia. All Minister Greg Hunt could manage was to commit a pitiful \$8m for additional protection in Australia and \$6m to combat illegal logging in the Asia-Pacific.

One notable global commitment made was to increase the area of marine reserves to 20% by 2020 and land protection to 17%.

A report of note was the first assessment of the benefits and ecosystem services provided by the areas on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Australia's Great Barrier Reef generates about \$250m a year from fishing and provides income to traditional Aboriginal owners who play a crucial role in sustainably managing parts of the reef. Tourism revenue from the Great Barrier Reef is worth more than \$5.2b annually.

Locals were hoping that the NSW Government would make a big announcement of a marine park for Sydney but alas that was not to be.

SCIENTIFIC AND COMMUNITY VIEWS ON COAL AND GAS MINING

The NSW Chief Scientist released her review of coal seam gas activity in late-September. The overall conclusion was that 'The CSG industry can in general be managed through careful designation of areas appropriate in geological and land-use terms for CSG extraction.'

The review highlighted the need to proceed with caution by improving standards in the workforce and operations by the CSG companies. It called for the creation of a State Whole-of-Environment Data Repository so that data from proposed and operating CSG industry operations can be interrogated systematically and in the context of the wider environment. This data should have been collected before the rapid expansion occurred.

The NSW Government responded by announcing that data collection and monitoring will be introduced consistent with the Chief Scientist's report and a 2 km exclusion zone will be applied round residential areas. Existing applications will be cancelled. A strategic release of land for gas exploration will be introduced after the election that is decided by a pre-assessment of environmental, economic and social factors. High quality agricultural land areas such as the Liverpool Plains are not quarantined.

Existing projects, such as the Santos Pilliga project, will continue to operate despite a number of reports of pollution incidents and inadequate monitoring.

The Nature Conservation Council's campaign highlighting the risks from coal seam gas and coal mining as well as protests at mine sites seems to have finally hit a chord with the NSW Government.

The very energetic Lane Cove electorate group of this campaign led by Sally Kennedy won a community action award from the Nature Conservation Council for their work in highlighting the coal and coal seam gas mining issue in the Resources Minister, Anthony Roberts's electorate. One significant exercise was doorknocking on four occasions and surveying local on their views on coal seam gas. The results were:

Awareness that 80% of NSW is covered in licences for mining or applications	61–71% not aware
Level of concern about impacts of mining on land, water	83–91% a little or very concerned
Should the government declare no-go zones in water catchment areas?	88–94% yes
Should the government declare no-go zones in productive agricultural areas?	79–89% yes
Do coal and gas companies have too much influence over the NSW Government?	70–76% yes

10/50 BUSHFIRE CLEARING LAWS FIASCO REALISED

Every day residents of northern Sydney have been living with the sound of chainsaws. They are very upset to see the hundreds of trees that are an essential part of the leafy character of our area being destroyed. The predicted environmental damage under the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code has already come to fruition. It is hard to understand how the NSW Government could pass such bad legislation. But, of course, they have done it before when they proposed to allow amateur hunting in national parks.



Before



After

The details of the problems with the legislation were explained in *STEP Matters* (Issue 177, p 1–3). At that time some of the details of the code were not known. Now the full fiasco has been revealed.

In areas where councils have been recording tree removal under the 10/50 rule, less than 5% were for legitimate fire-risk purposes. Most trees removed have been to improve views or facilitate development, not reduce bush fire risk. The number lost so far in Ku-ring-gai is estimated to be more than 400. In the small Lane Cove Council area the tally is over 240.

In response to community concerns, on 30 September the Government announced minimal changes to the 10/50 rule and an enquiry be conducted by the Rural Fire Service (RFS). Then after a sustained campaign calling

for a moratorium on clearing in urban areas the Government announced on 26 November that the clearing entitlement areas have been changed back to the old rules of:

- within 100 m of category 1 bushfire prone vegetation; and
- within 30 m of category 2 vegetation.

The results of the review are expected to be released in the first half of next year.

In its original form the 10/50 rule allowed clearing to be conducted in a blanket 350 m buffer zone from mapped bushfire prone vegetation.

While the power to stop the tree destruction has rested with the Government, the RFS has had to cop a lot of the flak from residents.

Some STEP members attended an information session run by the RFS in Pennant Hills. This was part of a consultation process that the RFS has been conducting around the state. The RFS representatives indicated that there were 12 aspects of the legislation and clearing code that needed to be amended or clarified. This is a terrible indictment of the legislation process. Examples were the ignorance of OH&S standards, conflicts with threatened species legislation, the removal of consultation with the RFS and the major issue, the definition of clearing entitlement areas.

Ku-ring-gai Council's submission to the enquiry gives a stark explanation of the poor application of science in defining the clearing entitlement areas:

There is also no evidence of the Code's capacity to influence the probability of wildfire impact on assets within the 10/50 entitlement areas (effectively the 350 m / 150 m zones), nor the magnitude of the consequences. The Code is based on assumptions that are inconsistent with the technical evidence cited in the industry literature.

It has been acknowledged that the 350 m extent is based upon research that 99% of houses that are lost in a bush fire are lost in the first 350 m from bushland. What is the justification behind using this distance as opposed to the 100 m buffer that applies to the Building in Bushfire Prone Areas Standard? This demonstrates an inconsistency in the risk management approach.

VALE NEROLI LOCK



Members of the Ku-ring-gai community were saddened to hear of the death of Neroli Lock in September. Neroli was a member of the STEP Committee for 16 years. Neroli was an integral part of Ku-ring-gai's Bushcare volunteer program, joining in 1991 the same time she joined the STEP Committee.

On joining the STEP Committee Neroli's first project was opposing the plan to build townhouses near The Broadway in Fox Valley, Wahroonga right on the edge of bushland. Ultimately STEP and The Broadway neighbours achieved the creation of Broadway Bushland Reserve. In addition to some quality bush it contains a rare remaining section of an ambitious traffic scheme hatched in the 1920s that aimed to provide an alternative route from the North Shore to the Harbour Bridge. The road building technique employed was a labour intensive style called 'modern telford' which required hand packing of sandstone by gangs of workmen – a common technique in days when both a labour force and a ready supply of large stones were available.

Neroli's tour de force was her work with the Blue Gum High Forest (BGHF) Group that fought to protect from housing development on Blue Gum High Forest land near the Dalrymple Hay Forest in St Ives. More details are on our website at <http://www.step.org.au/bghf.php>.

At her funeral Nancy Pallin (an equally active member of the BGHF Group) provided this tribute:

Many people contributed, but it was Neroli's energy that kept the rest of us going when it got really hard. She was always cheerful and enthusiastic; coming up with more ways to tackle the problem.

Central to the BGHF campaign was protecting, from development, 1 hectare of the best remnant of this rare kind of forest. The sale price was \$3m – a formidable problem. Neroli kept pressure on the real estate people telling them they would not be able to sell it.

After detailed research the BGHF Group applied to have the BGHF listed as an endangered ecological community under Commonwealth legislation. Neroli kept ringing Canberra, to get updates on progress. In the end it was listed as 'critically endangered' and this certainly put the brakes on development.

Neroli remembered the day we addressed the NSW Minister for Environment, and the mayors of councils which had BGHF remnants in their areas. This exercise raised awareness in high places but failed to solve the problem.

For four years the 'Blue Gummers' gave talks, led walks, held meetings and compiled reports. There were many late nights.

Luck was on our side when half of the one hectare was purchased as an environmental offset and added to Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve. Over 300 community people and organisations donated \$72,000. There was also a raffle. This enabled us to put pressure on Ku-ring-gai Council and the Commonwealth. Neroli had several conversations with the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai which were very effective. Finally the Commonwealth contributed funds under the National Reserve System, which resulted in an agreement between Council and the Commonwealth that this remnant of BGHF would be protected and the community involved in its management.

Without Neroli's strategic planning skills and sheer determination, the BGHF campaign would not have been won as it was in 2007.

Neroli worked tirelessly on restoring the bushland at Brown's Forest, the area of land where a house once stood and the rest of the Dalrymple Hay Reserve. She was skilled at obtaining grants that extended the effectiveness of the week-by-week bushcare work. She mentored and encouraged countless other volunteers to share her passion for the local environment.



A huge Grey ironbark being surveyed by Neroli at Brush farm Park, Eastwood while checking NPWS mapping of BGHF

WHAT OUR LOVE AFFAIR WITH COFFEE PODS REVEALS ABOUT OUR VALUES

By John Ric (Assoc Prof Strategic Management, Griffith University) and Nigel Martin (Lecturer, College of Business and Economics, ANU). It was published in The Conversation on 5 August 2014 (<http://theconversation.com>)

Mornings just aren't the same. Late sleepers, once troubled only by the quiet gurgle of the boiling kettle, are now shaken from their slumber by the guttural sounds of steaming water being forced through aluminium or plastic coffee pods.

Conveniently secreted into the coffee machine's collecting receptacle, the pangs of guilt from the latte socialists (and others) are only tweaked when the dank pods require emptying – generally well after the coffee has been consumed.

Australia is in love with coffee pods. Wooed by no less than Hollywood star George Clooney, pods have taken Australian homes and workplaces by storm.

As is the case for other beverages, Australians have shifted to drinking better quality coffee and pods are part of that mix. While pods are one of the most expensive ways to buy packaged coffee, they are also one of the most convenient.

The Swiss coffee pod innovators at Nespresso (a division of the food behemoth Nestlé) have been joined by usurpers including Germany's Aldi and Italy's Cafitaly. Proving that patents are easier to take out than protect, Nespresso's share of the world pod market has been in steep decline. This having been said, the industry is in a rapid phase of growth – sales are soaring – and thus few are complaining.

Yet the news is far from all good. Pods are emblematic of a wider problem in our society, where we often say one thing and generally do another. In this case, where many of us like to speak about being 'green' or living sustainably, even while sipping from a cup of coffee produced by an industry that is about as sustainable as an ageing Soviet nuclear power plant.

If, as some predict, pod use doubles over the next five years, a veritable environmental tsunami is in store. While recyclable in theory, in practice pods rarely are, particularly the plastic variety beloved by the budget-conscious.

Instead, they end in landfill: perhaps a poignant sign for garbage archaeologists a thousand years from now of this generation's environmental profligacy.

Last year, independent consumer group Choice reported that Nespresso had sold an estimated 28 billion capsules worldwide – about 28 million kilograms of aluminium, much of which may be sitting in landfill, with recycling figures not made public.

New Zealand's Ethical Coffee Company has created a vegetable-based biodegradable coffee capsule that is Nespresso-compatible and can be thrown straight into the compost. However, the shelf life of these pods is likely to be far more limited than the most commonly used aluminium or double-wrapped plastic pods.

Environmental problems are not the only vices embodied in pods. The coffee industry has long been wracked by criticism that its sourcing practices, especially in the third world, are rapacious.

The Swiss multinational Nestlé, which first dreamed up the pod phenomenon, is no stranger to such criticism. It runs its own 'sustainability' accreditation program, which it proudly pronounces now exceeds 75% for beans sourced. However, cynics might see the self-accreditation program as essentially self-serving, delivering few benefits or value-adding opportunities to coffee-growing communities.

Perhaps most prosaically, critics often argue that pod coffee just isn't any good.

A decent barista generally uses between 10 and 20 g of ground coffee in a serve, while pods contain barely 5 grams. The decision to make the pods so small was carefully chosen to maximise profits, not taste.

As a result, the coffee produced generally fails blind taste tests – labelled watery, musty and underwhelming by Choice. Hardly the words that the marketers would like to hear.

And yet, the march of the pods continues.

The American satirist HL Mencken famously quipped that 'no one in this world ... has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people'. In today's world, you could add the word 'laziness', or more charitably 'love of convenience', to the list.

Pods, in their own humble way, tell us much about the future intersection of environmentalism and consumerism.

Western consumers are generally supportive of the environment – so long as they don't have to do anything about it. Multinationals everywhere are wise to this, of course, and have created a phenomenon known to cynical greenies and academics as 'greenwashing'. This entails wrapping a product in a veil of environmentally positive haze, regardless of how fundamentally egregious its environmental credentials are.

It all paints a less than rosy picture for the future, in which more businesses help create, rather than solve, environmental problems. How this all plays out remains to be seen. One thing, however, is predictable. For innovators who can blend branding and convenience while ignoring all else, the future seems assured.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR TO OCTOBER 2014

The work of STEP during this past year has been focused on state-wide issues as well as local developments, all of which pose threats to the environment and the wellbeing of future generations. Details are provided in our bi-monthly newsletter and therefore will be covered only briefly in this report.

Committee

Land use laws and regulations are becoming increasingly complex. A document that appears simple will make reference to many other documents that have a significant bearing on the overall operation of the instrument. The Ku-ring-gai Development Control Plan is a case in point.

We are fortunate to have Committee members who have the skills and are willing to put in the time to come to grips with the possible implications of planning changes. Andrew Little has put in many hours on these documents.

As always the Committee members have done a great job in steering the organisation. For 2014-15 the Committee membership will be unchanged.

We urge all members to consider nominating for the Committee. We are always on the lookout for people who can help with our work. We also welcome members who are willing to help out with a particular project or issue.

Publications

This year was a quieter year on the publication front. Sales continue to be steady and are boosted by participation in special events such as the Wildflower Festival and John Martyn's library talks.

Accounts

Our finances remain sound with a small surplus from activities this year. We have maintained our Environment Protection Fund that provides for Deductible Gift Recipient status for donations. The purpose of the Fund is to support STEP's environmental objectives. This Fund now comes under the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. We received a total of \$854 in donations in the past financial year.

Electronic Media

Our website remains an important source of information about our activities and contains copies of our submissions to local and state governments on current issues and development proposals.

Trish Lynch is doing a fabulous job with our Facebook page with great selection of photographs to enhance the up-to-date information on events and issues. John Burke

continues to provide incisive comments on Twitter. The number of followers is increasing slowly, with 78 last time I looked. Only a small number are STEP members so please consider joining Twitter and following us.

We are currently working on a revision of our website and hope to implement new facilities such as direct payment through the site.

Education

We continue to support the Young Scientist Awards run by the NSW Science Teachers Association with a prize in the environmental sustainability category. It is encouraging to see the quality of the innovative ideas presented in the student's projects. We thank STEP member Syd Smith for doing the judging

Talks

We organised four public talks this year on the Powerful Owl Project, a Zero Emissions plan for Australia, Gardens of Stone and other Icons under Threat from mining and Planning in NSW. The third STEP Lecture in October last year by Professor Andy Pitman on the Science of Climate Change attracted a large audience.

Walks

STEP organises a walk every month or two (seven since our last AGM) in the local area with a focus on the beauty of Sydney's bushland and environment. We aim to encourage new walkers so most walks are not challenging. We thank Margaret Booth, Frank Freeman, Andrew Little, John Martyn and Jill Green for organising and leading walks this past year. If you have a request for a walk please let us know.

Newsletter

Our newsletter, STEP Matters, is our main means of communicating events, our activities and issues with our members. We also include other articles with an environmental that will be of interest to members. The newsletter is also sent to local councillors and politicians. We welcome alerts from our members of local events and developments for inclusion in future editions and, of course, feedback on articles is always welcome.

All past editions are available on our website going back to scans of the typewritten versions from 1978.

News of Past Committee Members

We were saddened to hear of the deaths of two former Committee members who made major contributions to the work of STEP. Alan Catford was a founding member who helped design the STEP Track in South Turramurra. He was a strong advocate for selective hand clearing for bushfire management rather than wholesale bulldozing of vegetation. Neroli Lock was one of the leading contributors in the long running

project to expand the conservation of Blue Gum High Forest in Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve (Nancy Pallin headed the campaign).

Environmental Issues

The major issue for our local area this year is the rushed implementation by the NSW Government of new bushfire vegetation clearing rules that have little justification in their applicability to urban areas. Submissions from urban councils and residents have been ignored. Major parts of northern Sydney are affected by rules allowing landowners to clear trees within 10 m of their house and to clear other vegetation within 50 m. Already hundreds of trees have been chopped down. Many large trees are being lost that are significant for their biodiversity, heritage, shade and animal habitat. STEP and many other conservation groups will continue to lobby for the suspension of this legislation.

The other major issue for this year is the planning decisions that have given priority to developers and miners to the detriment of local communities and the environment. As we will hear at the talk to be given by Corinne Fisher after the AGM, a Good Planning Charter has been drafted by the Better Planning Network in preparation for the next state election defining the principles that should be adopted by the parliament in any new planning legislation.

Also in preparation for the next state election the group called Our Land, Our Water, Our Future has been formed to explain to people the extent of the risks to our community wellbeing from proposed and current development of mining and coal seam gas in NSW. STEP has joined this group. A subset of this campaign is Protect Sydney's Water, a group that has been highlighting the damage being done to Sydney's water supply in the Woronora area from longwall mining and coal seam gas.

We will continue to push for greater action for recognition of the expected effects of climate change in planning documents.

Outlook for 2015

The next NSW Government election will be held in March 2015. STEP expects to be actively involved in analysing the policies of the candidates.

We will continue to closely monitor local developments in response to the continuing pressure from population growth.

YOUNG SCIENTIST AWARD

STEP continues to support the Science Teachers' Association NSW program encouraging school students to get more actively involved in science projects. STEP sponsors an award for a project relating to an environmental issue. This year's winner was Nicole Sung from PLC Sydney for her work on recycling of grey water. We thank Syd Smith once again for judging for us.

Syd's report on the project was:

Nicole presented a mass of valuable material on grey water and gave a detailed account of its potential to be recycled or used for plant growth. Different concentrations of grey water were used to measure the growth rates of mung beans.

The analysis was presented as detailed steps and accompanied by excellent colour photos. pH was measured as well and numerous variables were considered before her findings were summarised.

The research found that the lower the concentration of grey water present, the mean height of the sprouting bean increased.

There was one inconsistency and Nicole agreed that her work was limited to the study of only one food species. In spite of this her study could lead to future research on the optimum concentration of grey water that can produce suitable growth in different food crops.

Given the value of water to the environment and the need for Australia to be independent in its food production, I found her study to be of immense significance to sustainable food production and its relationship to the concentration of grey water recycling.



LOCAL EVENTS AND INFORMATION

Try Rogaining (using a STEP Map)

The NSW Rogaining Association is holding a LaneCoveRivergaine on Saturday 28 February 2015, assembling at the Baden-Powell Scout Centre, Pomona Street, Pennant Hills.

Rogaining involves teams of two to five persons navigating to checkpoints marked on a map – see www.nswrogaining.org for information.

You can choose between a 6 and 12 hour event, starting at 11 am. The event is open to everyone. Over 350 entrants of all ages (6 to 80+) and abilities are expected – from elite athletes to walkers and families, some with strollers. You get to choose your own route and level of difficulty and how long you take, within the 6 or 12 hour time limit

The map being used is derived from the STEP map of Walking Tracks of the Lane Cove Valley. John Martyn has modified the map for use as a rogaine event. The event encompasses the upper Lane Cove River Valley from the source of the river to De Burghs Bridge and surrounding suburbs. John has helped to identify the most spectacular tracks and vistas for the event.

You don't need special gear. Comfortable jogging or walking shoes and appropriate clothing are fine. Food and water should be carried, though bubblers and shops are located throughout the area. A compass isn't essential, but would be useful.

Instruction will be available for all first timers. Just form a team and register on-line.

Information and registration (in January) at <http://nswrogaining.org/AboutEvents/Events/15MG/15MG.htm>.

Enquiries: 0419 663 539, ted@woodley.net.au.

Take a Photo for Conservation?

We don't normally promote a commercial organisation but this is helping a good cause. The Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife is asking for support in their bid to win a share of money being offered by the Dick Smith Foods Foundation.

All you have to do is have some Dick Smith foods product(s) in your pantry, take a photo of them, send it to charity@dicksmithfoods.com.au and tell them that you vote for the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife. Find out more at fnpw.org.au/dicksmith.

With your vote, the Foundation could be awarded \$10,000, \$20,000 or even an incredible \$50,000 by the Dick Smith Foods \$1m to Charity challenge! The money will be spent on conservation projects.

The Foundation is an independent charitable organisation with three main activities, it:

- acquires high conservation value land to add to the National Reserve System (aka national estate) so it can be protected in perpetuity;
- funds wildlife and plant conservation projects; and
- provides funds to preserve Australian cultural heritage sites.

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.

All issues (from when we began in 1978) can be viewed online, usually in full-colour.

Feedback

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

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.

STEP Committee

Jill Green – President
Robin Buchanan – Vice-president
Frank Budai – Treasurer
Helen Wortham – Secretary
Anita Andrew
Don Davidson
Andrew Little
John Martyn
Helen Worrall

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Name		
Address		
Tel (h)	Tel (m)	E-mail

These are member's prices, see our website for non-member prices	Cost	Number	Cost
Maps of Walking Tracks			
Lane Cove Valley	\$15		
Middle Harbour Valley (North): Bungaroo and Roseville Bridge	\$15		
Middle Harbour Valley (South): Northbridge and North Harbour	\$15		
Books			
Sydney's Natural World (includes \$10 p&p)	\$45		
Field Guide to the Bushland of the Lane Cove Valley (includes \$10 p&p)	\$45		
Understanding the Weather (includes \$10 p&p)	\$30		
Donation (donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible)			
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