



STEP INC.

Community Based Environmental Conservation

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Eleventh Annual General Meeting September 14, 1989

It is a privilege and a pleasure to report to members of STEP on the progress of our organisation since our last Annual General Meeting in September 1988.

It has been a year of strenuous activity for the Committee, a year characterised by freeways, plans of management, freeways, expansion of membership, freeways, the STEP map, freeways and a developing awareness in some quarters that green is beautiful, or if not beautiful, less ugly, and possibly helpful in solving the environmental problems that beset our local area, our country and indeed the Planet Earth.

FREEWAYS

On the freeways issue, the lobbying activities of STEP have included the writing of submissions and letters, attendance at many meetings and membership of several committees both local and more broadly based. STEP has, as always, cooperated with local groups, Kuring-gai Council and State organisations to maximise our effectiveness.

STEP has for many years been fighting for the release of the F3 corridor from Pearce's Corner to Linley Point. The section from Epping Road to Linley Point, along with the Bluegum Creek corridor, has now been released, and in February of this year, the North West Sector Road Needs Study was issued by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) of NSW to determine the need to retain the corridors in the Epping Road to Pearce's Corner section.

STEP responded in the following ways:

- . a submission to the RTA, which included a copy of the STEP position paper on the Lane Cove Valley Freeway
- . a summary of the STEP position on the new proposals for the information of STEP members and other interested parties
- . a petition to the RTA which attracted 1,600 signatures
- . a press release to all local newspapers
- . attendance at, and addressing public meetings held in response to the "North West Sector Road Needs Study"
- . individual responses to the RTA by most STEP members
- . foundation membership of the newly formed "Coalition against Lane Cove Valley Freeways"
- . regular attendance at the meetings of the Coalition, which continues to meet frequently
- . support of P.A.V.E. - People Against Valley Expressways
- . a rally on the occasion of the annual STEP Heritage Week activity - a bushwalk in an area threatened by the freeway proposals

The expertise developed in the STEP committee, largely through the acumen and energy of John Burke, led to STEPs being invited to join a "Castlereagh Freeway Task Force" established by the RTA. We were delighted that John agreed to represent STEP on this committee. STEP responded to the F2 Castlereagh Freeway Environmental Impact Statement, and to the "Summary Report on Public Participation" in the North West Sector Road Needs Study. Neither of these reports was considered satisfactory by STEP.

As all members of STEP will know, our position is now, and always has been, that we are implacably opposed to solutions to urban problems that involve the destruction of remnant urban bushland. We cannot stand by and allow bushland to be alienated by careless planning. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. Bushland is priceless and irreplaceable.

STEP has recently prepared for the "Coalition Against Lane Cove Valley Freeways" a list of answers to frequently asked questions about freeways. As it will be of interest to STEP members, copies will be supplied to every member.

The Coalition has also met with the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai, the Chief Engineer and two senior RTA executives to discuss the release of the B1 corridor south east of Kissing Point Road, and the Kissing Point Road Corridor north of the B2 intersection. STEP has submitted a proposal to Council on the future use of land on the section of the B1 corridor to be released.

As I survey the amazing amount of work that has been undertaken on the freeways issue, largely between February and August of this year, I feel admiration for those who have worked so hard, as volunteers, on behalf of all of us. First I wish to thank John Burke for his time, energy and clear-headed approach, then Yvonne Langshaw, STEP's Past President, and the rest of the STEP Committee for their strong back-up, especially Ralph Pridmore. I would also like to record our appreciation of the energy and effectiveness of Elaine Malicki, the Coalition President; to applaud the work of P.A.V.E. and W.A.G. (Wahroonga Action Group) and the work of Caron Morrison, Bruno Krockenburger, Pat Stewart and Neroli Lock. Before leaving the Freeways issue, I want to quote a statement from John Burke -

"The freeway issue is just one symptom of the badly planned and unrestricted growth of Sydney. With our current population of 3,500,000 we have already put a freeway through a National Park near Berowra and are filling in Botany Bay for runways while urban expansion continues into virgin bushland at Cherrybrook and elsewhere. It may be that STEP should look further ahead to the pressures on our environment which will be brought about with the extra one million population expected by 2021 and beyond."

BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT

Earlier this year, Ku-ring-gai Council published its Plan of Management for local bushland, being the first local government body to fulfil this requirement of the SEPP (State Environmental Planning Policy) No 19. STEP welcomed this Plan, and has requested Council in correspondence and by speaking at Council meetings, to expedite particular aspects of the Plan, such as increased staffing for bush regeneration work.

The Council's Bushland Management Working Party continues to work effectively, offering advice and guidance to Council. STEP's nominee to the Working Party is Robyn Tuft. Meetings are chaired by John Burke.

In the upper Lane Cove Valley, the sewerage and drainage works of the Water Board have had some disastrous side effects for bushland. STEP has met with Water Board officers and Council officers on site, to find solutions to immediate problems. Some small progress has been made, and more is likely to follow, with the development of a plan of management for the valley floor and catchment area being developed by the Water Board's "Lane Cove River Valley Study". STEP's representative in this study is Dr Robyn Tuft. Her technical ability in water quality matters as well as bushland management will be valuable.

The good thing about this study is the involvement of all the relevant land managers - Councils, SRA, Water Board, plus groups such as STEP. Our aim will be to hold the group together until a complete Plan of Management and arrangements for its implementation are completed. STEP can be proud of its part in this development.

As the need arises, STEP writes to local government authorities in the metropolitan area and beyond to urge that local bushland be not destroyed for whatever purpose is contemplated - housing, industrial development, sports complexes, tourism. It's a sad fact that so many government and local government authorities still see bushland as spare land, and thus suitable for development. The proposed relocation of a bus depot to Mole Trig, St Ives, is a recent example of this uncaring attitude towards our bushland.

In July we received from Council a copy of its recently completed "Recreation Needs Survey". This survey showed, among other things, that Ku-ring-gai residents reported that 57% had visited local bushland for the purpose of bushwalking during the study period. We were astonished at this high figure and feel that Council should now feel an obligation to allocate more of its resources to bushland management - track maintenance, signposting, weed control and suchlike.

BUSH REGENERATION

STEP's two year project in Cooper Crescent is drawing to a close. It has been a difficult site, subject to frequent inundation. Infill plantings have been fairly successful and the site is certainly in better shape now. We have been assisted in our work by boys and girls of the Venturer Scouts and have appreciated their enthusiasm and interest.

STEP was gratified to find that Council has, at long last, erected many handsome signs to demarcate the Bradley Reserve. The Bradley Reserve marks the site of the first bush regeneration efforts in Ku-ring-gai - instituted by Helen Petersen for STEP, and employing the Bradley method of work. We thank Yvonne Langshaw for her leadership of STEP's bush regeneration team for many years.

I would like to remind STEP members that there are now many courses available for those who would like to become qualified bush regenerators. Five members of our current STEP Committee have this qualification, and a sixth has begun study.

THE STEP MAP

We are hopeful that before the year's end we shall be able to launch the STEP map of walking tracks in the Upper Lane Cove Valley. This has been about five years in the making, the last two years being particularly important in testing out drafts. The map is being professionally drawn and printed by the Central Mapping Authority in Bathurst. We have to thank Margaret Booth of the STEP Committee for her vision, determination and leadership in this project. We have been assisted by the geographer Dr Graeme Aplin of Macquarie University in drawing up the Map, and by the Paddy Pallin Foundation in a loan to defray publication costs. We appreciate their generosity in helping us.

ACTIVITIES FOR MEMBERS

In addition to bush regeneration, we have held three bushwalks and two meetings especially for STEP members, though all activities have been open to interested members of the public. The first was a "Water Quality" walk led by Robyn Tuft. In April, our planned Heritage Week activity was a bushwalk in South Turrumurra, taking in the STEP track constructed by our members. As the Freeway issue was then being hotly debated, the walk turned into a rally and march, as 300 men, women and children took to the bush, with the support of the Coalition and P.A.V.E. Thanks to Alan Catford for leading us and to Yvonne for the catering.

In August our annual Spring Bushwalk was rained out, so it was rescheduled for September, when about 35 people enjoyed the sunshine, fragrance and beauty of our local bush in early spring. We thank Glenn Johnson for leading us and Ralph Pridmore for catering.

A great deal of effort was put into the talk by Dr David Ellyard in August on the Greenhouse Effect and what can be done about a warmer, wetter world, to mitigate its potentially disastrous effects on life on earth. About 180 people listened intently to Dr Ellyard's discourse and a lively question and answer session followed. Thanks are due to each member of the STEP Committee, and to other STEP members who worked hard to make such a success of the evening. The second talk is the one we are looking forward to this evening when Tein McDonald addresses us on weeds and their management in Ku-ring-gai. A further activity was a bushwalk undertaken jointly with St Andrews Uniting Church, and led by Yvonne Langshaw.

MEMBERSHIP OF OTHER GROUPS

Already noted is our membership of Ku-ring-gai Council's Bushland Management Working Party, the RTA's Castlereagh Freeway Task Force, the Water Board's Lane Cove River Valley Study and the Coalition Against Lane Cove Valley. In addition STEP is a paid up member of the Nature Conservation Council (NCC), sending two delegates to its annual conference; the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists, where we are represented by Yvonne Langshaw, and C.U.T.S. , the Coalition for Urban Transport Sanity, represented by Ken Watson. In common with most conservation groups, we subscribe to the Environmental Defender's Office and help support an environmental lobbyist to the State Parliament.

THE COMMITTEE

The work of STEP has been mainly carried out by the Committee at its monthly meetings. During this year the committee has dealt with huge amounts of correspondence: inwards 222 items, including newsletters from other local conservation groups; outwards 88 items, plus many copies of certain letters, each outward letter being drafted by a committee member. These figures do not include membership matters - new members, renewals of membership and enquiries, nor the hundreds of phone calls made and received by STEP committee members. Other matters dealt with by the committee and not mentioned elsewhere in this report include : initiating a small change to the Constitution in anticipation of achieving tax-free status for STEP, lobbying Council on the matter of proportional representation and running an information stall at the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, with the help of STEP members. Issues not directly connected with Ku-ring-gai have also received letters of support - the Wedderburn Koala colony, the NSW coastline, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, surplus Defence Force Land at Sydney Harbour, the Byles Creek enquiry, to name but a few.

Closer to home, Council has been contacted on weeds, drains, indigenous trees, local environmental policy, residential development controls, Browns Road, name signs, Bicentennial park, the proposed Indoor Leisure Centre in Tryon Rd, access to bushland and the hazard reduction program.

THE MEMBERSHIP

Membership of STEP has grown steadily this year, due in large part to the work of Pat Dunn, Chris Burke and others in letterboxing and otherwise distributing membership leaflets. We now have over 300 members, a very healthy membership for a local conservation group.

Finally, I wish to congratulate the outgoing committee on their productivity on behalf of STEP. Whatever we have achieved is due to their dedication to achieving STEP's aims and objectives. Sue Jones has served another year as a reliable secretary; Geoff Suggate, our treasurer, has revamped our computerised membership records. Helen Petersen has informed me that she will not be standing for re-election to the STEP Committee. We salute her for her long association with STEP and the tremendous work she has done for us.

I also want to record my appreciation of the Newsletter assistants, those who help with assembling the mailout and those who deliver to members in their neighbourhood. I must mention, too, the co-operation that exists between STEP and KuBES, and our appreciation of the work of Janet Fairlie-Cunninghame on all conservation issues in Ku-ring-gai and beyond.

As STEP enters its 12th year, I hope for it a continuation of its effective role as monitor of and advocate for, urban bushland, working through a strong committee and strong membership support.

Jenny Simons