

STEP Inc Annual Report for the Year to October 2012

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 short comings 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.

Jill Green
President