

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 (DGR) 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 State Government of new 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 metres of their house and to clear other vegetation within 50 metres. 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 state 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.

Jill Green
September 2014