

Newsletter No 169
March 2016

WEPA



Willoughby Environmental Protection Association

Next Meeting

Tuesday 15 March 2016

Glenaeon School, Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag
(between Charles and Edith Streets and opposite The Parapet)

8 pm

Annual General Meeting and election of office bearers for 2016
to be followed by

Changing the game: providing new hope for Australia's threatened wildlife

Shauna Chadlowe
Australian Wildlife Conservancy

Across the continent, native wildlife populations are in severe decline: 1 in 4 mammals and 1 in 7 birds are currently threatened with extinction. Sadly even our national parks resemble marsupial ghost towns. Australia urgently needs a new approach to conservation, but what can be done to address the key threats to our wildlife?

Discover how Australia's largest private conservation organisation, Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) is implementing a groundbreaking new initiative to save Australia's threatened wildlife from extinction. AWC protects threatened wildlife and habitats across more than 3 million hectares of land including in iconic regions like the Kimberley, Lake Eyre and the Top End.

Shauna Chadlowe is a Development Executive with AWC. Prior to joining AWC she was the Executive Director of IGPC, Sydney, a global conference organisation and before that she was a lawyer for a well-established Sydney law firm.

It is a great pleasure to welcome Shauna back to speak to us. Please join us and be inspired. Please bring your family, friends and colleagues and join us afterwards for supper and a chat. Our meeting is free. For further information, please phone Gay (9958 8569) or Christina (9438 4073).

Annual Subscriptions are due before the AGM. Please fill in the enclosed pink slip and either pay cash at the meeting, post the slip and a cheque or transfer your sub electronically (details are on the pink slip).

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Diary Dates

Repair Café Northside

Sunday 13 March 2016 1pm-3pm

Church Hall, entrance off Mowbray Road, corner of Mowbray Road and Pacific Highway
Repair Café is repairing broken items together, hands-on advice on how to fix things, encounters and inspiration. Repair Café is free, but donations are welcome. You can chat over coffee or tea and home-made cakes as you repair that wobbly chair, jumper with moth holes, shoes that need mending, blunt garden shears or that mobile phone that mystifies you.
There will also be another date in April, yet to be fixed.
Contact: Wendy Dwyer (0410 280 912) or Wendy Bishop (9420 4884)

Exhibition: Willoughby's Wildside

Until 15 March 2016

Willoughby Council Foyer Exhibition Space, Victor Street Chatswood
More information from Simon Brown, Willoughby Wildlife Officer on 9777 7872. While you are enjoying the exhibition don't forget to look at the wonderful paintings of local snakes.

Planning in the Public Interest - finding a balance by Philip Thalís

Wednesday 16 March 2016 8pm

Marion Mahony Hall, Glenaeon School, Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag

Philip Thalís, of HILL THALIS architecture and urban projects P/L, won the competition for Barangaroo but his winning designs were dumped in favour of the overdevelopment we now see on the site. Philip is a most interesting and entertaining speaker. Anyone who is concerned about what is happening to the fabric of Sydney should come and hear him. He will be the guest speaker at the AGM of the Castlecrag Progress Association. Free. Refreshments provided.

Willoughby Fauna Fair

Sunday 20 March 2016 9.30am-3pm

Currey Park, 10 Victor Street, Chatswood (opposite the Dougherty Centre). Note the new location, occasioned by renovations in Willoughby Park.
There will be wildlife shows, kids' activities, information stalls, and food stalls.
The Talks Tent will feature a great line up of inspiring speakers. Here you will be able to listen to special guests **Costa Georgiadis**, from TV's Gardening Australia and **Martyn Robinson**, formerly with the Australian Museum, as they explore wildlife in the backyard, including bugs essential for healthy soils. (BYO live bugs and sample of garden soil). **Professor Mark P Taylor** from the Vegesafe program will explore some contaminants that can be found in garden soil. **Dr Arthur White** will talk about local frogs, **Sandra Guy** from Sydney Wildlife will talk about bats. Dr Holly Parsons will talk about birds and ecologist **Narawan Williams** and arborist **Margot Blues** will talk about trees and habitat, including habitat hollows, nest boxes, big trees and little termites. Learn how to keep stingless bees from **Tim Heard**, entomologist and author of The Australian Native Bee Book. Details of the presentations will be available on the website closer to the event.
You can bring your dog on a lead and get free obedience lessons and microchip check, get free care advice from the canine vet stall or talk to the Cat Protection Society about how to keep a cat and also protect wildlife.
More information, including about other stalls, is available from Diary Dates at council's website: www.Willoughby.NSW.gov.au

Other Willoughby Environmental Workshops

Information from Council's website above or get a copy of the WCC Environmental Workshops and Events Calendar for the whole year.
Some interesting ones are:
Gardening the Verge (Naremburn) Saturday 16 April
Cuttings Workshop (Propagation) Sunday 17 April
Meet Our Energy Expert, Sunday 24 April
Changing Landscapes (Northbridge) Saturday 17 May
Living with Big Trees, Saturday 14 May.
Most events and workshops require booking and you need to be quick for some. Times and booking details are available on the website and in the calendar.

Sydney Sustainable Living Festival

5-20 March 2016

The Fauna Fair is part of this Sydney-wide festival which features a number of interesting events, some of which may require booking.

For details see: www.sydney-sustainableliving.com

Public Inquiry - Mosman/North Sydney/Willoughby Merger proposal

Tuesday 22 March 2016 5.00pm-10.00pm

The Chatswood Club, 11 Help Street, Chatswood

Wednesday 23 March 2016 5.00pm-10.00pm

The Mosman Club, 719 Military Road, Mosman

If you would like to attend you are requested to register at www.councilboundaryreview.nsw.gov.au or by contacting 1300 813 020. If you would like to speak, please indicate this when you register to attend.

Why do we need to cool our cities with plants?

with **Michael Mobbs**, author of *Sustainable House* and *Sustainable Food*

Wednesday 23 March 2016 10am for 10.30am-11.30am

Joseph Maiden Theatre, Royal Botanic Gardens

For booking details, contact 9231 8182. Non-members \$25

Living Chemical Free

Thursday 7 April 2016 6.30pm-8.30pm

Coachwood Room, Level 6, Willoughby Council, Victor Street Chatswood

Bookings: Tejinder Gill, 9777 7730

Evening Spotlight Bushwalk

Friday 8 April 2016

Explosives Reserve, Cammaray Road, Castle Cove

Bookings: Emma Hayes, 9777 7755

Submissions to Inquiry into Mosman/North

Sydney/Willoughby Merger Proposal

Friday 8 April 2016, 5pm Closing date for submissions.

Submissions can be made online at

www.councilboundaryreview.nsw.gov.au or by mail to GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001.

Heritage Festival - Discovery and Rediscoveries

Saturday 16 April 2016 Rediscovering the Griffins'

Castlecrag. Guided walk through some of the reserves and walkways. Learn about their heritage and the community that the Griffins fostered at Castlecrag. **10.00am-12.30pm.**

The people and places in the 1930s and 1940s. Former residents, memorable personalities, and slides from the 1920s-30s from a recently discovered collection.

2.30pm-4.00pm Glenaeon School Castlecrag.

Information: info@griffinsociety.org Bookings: www.trybooking.com/JZGG

Baird's ongoing war on trees - and a new Biodiversity Conservation Bill

The Baird Government's War on Trees not only continues but is getting up steam.

The ill-considered 10/50 Rule, introduced eighteen months ago, permitted removal of trees and vegetation within 10 metres of a house, under the guise of reducing bushfires. It was recognised as a sham from the outset. It was a bonanza for tree loppers, many of them cowboys, but a disaster for wildlife and for the rest of us who value the contribution of trees to the environment and to our well-being. Of course, the developers did well, and a few people got better views. Under sustained community pressure, the distance of the house from bushfire prone land was reduced from 350 metres to 100 metres, but thousands of trees were removed, and the chainsaws are still going. 10/50 has not been repealed.

In Randwick the removal of century-old trees continues, in spite of alternative routes proposed by the community, which is outraged by the destruction. In typical sneaky bureaucrat fashion, the NSW government and ALTRAC, the light rail builder, which also includes TRANSDEV, the local light rail operator, commenced tree removal over the Christmas/New Year period. They are planning to remove 400 in all. The promise of eight new trees for each one removed is going to do little to replace the lost wildlife habitat, air filtering capability, climate modifying and carbon storage capacity and the visual and aesthetic contribution to the area, in any meaningful time frame.

The West Connex roadway (M5 East section) is another destruction zone. Although the EIS admits threatened vegetation communities in the Wollie Creek area will be destroyed, the best the Roads and Maritime consultants can come up with is offsets. Because there is no local bushland that is 'like-for-like' they suggest other bushland many kilometres away - 'not the same, but it will do'. What planet do these people come from? Where is their social licence to operate?

The Baird government is now preparing to go state wide, in a one-size-fits-all frenzy of tree clearing which will have major impacts, not only on rural lands but also on the city and suburbs, where our local bushland and significant trees are at risk. It is intent on abolishing the Native Vegetation Act, passed by parliament in 2003 to stop broad-scale clearing. It will be replaced by a so-called Biodiversity Conservation Act, an Orwellian title for legislation that will hasten the demise of native wildlife and destroy their habitat across the state.

First, a little background.

Since 1788, sixty one percent of the original native vegetation of NSW has already been cleared, thinned or significantly disturbed, most of it in the last 50 years.

Australia's first national park, the Royal national park south of Sydney, was established in 1878, seven years after the world's first, Yellowstone National Park in the USA.

At that time green space was valued for many uses other than conservation - artillery ranges, ornamental gardens, cricket, race courses and even mining and quarrying were permitted. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that bushwalkers, nature lovers, scientists and conservationists began to call for 'true' nature reserves'. In 1948 the first 'nature law' - The Fauna Act - was passed.

Local environmental groups began to be formed and a peak body for these groups, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, was formed in 1955. Prior to that time there was no

National Parks and Wildlife Service, no Environmental Protection Authority, no Land & Environment Court and no marine parks. Land clearing was uncontrolled, rainforests were clear felled and wildlife was decimated.

Vested interests opposed those agitating for the protection of the natural environment but pressure from the latter eventually resulted in ever stronger laws - The National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, the Threatened Species Act 1995 and the Native Vegetation Act 2003.

Because of these laws, natural places containing diverse and unique flora and fauna exist today. They are all that stand between healthy habitat and desecration of our wildlife. Leading ecologists have estimated that the Native Vegetation Act (which does not apply to urban areas) has prevented the deaths of more than one million animals over ten years - more than 100,000 native animals who have escaped death each year.

Pre-election promises

Before Mike Baird came to office he committed to 'enhancing the state's biodiversity to benefit current and future generations'. However 48 hours before the election the government announced that it would scrap the Native Vegetation Act.

Two years ago, the Queensland government under Campbell Newman severely undermined native vegetation rules, resulting in the doubling of land-clearing and the removal of almost 300,000 hectares of bushland, and the release of 35 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, further exacerbating climate change.

This is the direction in which the Baird government is heading.

Who is agitating for the new laws?

The push is coming from radical members of the National Party and members of the NSW Farmers Association. It is not supported by progressive farmers, many of whom are working to protect biodiversity on their land.

Native vegetation is crucial for biodiversity protection, and as many farmers know, it also improves farm land value while increasing production outcomes. Protecting biodiversity and having controls on land clearing benefits the environment and the economy.

Prominent agriculture and climate campaigner Josh Gilbert, until recently chairman of the NSW Young Farmers, and who represented Australia at the COP 21 talks in Paris in November, resigned his position after alleging his philosophical disagreement on land clearing reform earned him threats of personal attacks from within the NSW Farmers Association, should he speak out against the issue and voice his concerns. The NSW association has been lobbying for many years for relaxation of land clearing laws and is currently negotiating with the state government to develop a policy to repeal the current laws.

Biodiversity Legislation Review

Despite more than 80 per cent of submissions to the Biodiversity Legislation Review calling for retaining or strengthening environmental provisions, the recommendations call for the wholesale repeal of the native Vegetation Act, Threatened Species Act and parts of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

Of particular concern is the recommendation of greater use of biodiversity offsetting - a flawed policy which results in net biodiversity loss. Instead of finding offset sites that match the

ones being destroyed, the so-called 'like-for-like' principle, proponents will now be able to find any broadly similar areas, or even worse, just pay money into a fund.

The Total Environment Centre reports that a recent Federal review of NSW offsetting rules found that offsets are often not equivalent to and may be of lesser quality than the habitat under development. Current rules even allow mine rehabilitation sites and carbon sequestration to be counted as offsets.

TEC notes an even more serious problem arises when there are simply no suitable offsets available i.e. there are no way to mitigate the loss of habitat from a proposed development. This is particularly the case with urban bushland. In some cases developers may simply buy their way out of offsetting by investing in 'supplementary measures' which may include public education and research projects.

Conservation groups walkout on consultation

The state's peak conservation groups have been engaged in top-level stakeholder consultation with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage which is drafting the new laws.

This consultation came to an abrupt end on 19th February when the groups withdrew from the consultation process and are now seeking direct talks with the Ministers for Environment, Planning and Primary industries.

The groups issued a joint statement about the withdrawal:

"We have provided detailed analysis and constructive feedback to help develop a conservation law that addresses the increasing threats to wildlife, soils and climate, but it is now clear that the government is on a course to pursue development at high environmental cost.

"It has become clear that the broad outcomes of this process are being predetermined by a minority of rural interests, and the proposed *Biodiversity Conservation Act* will fail to secure adequate protection for our wildlife, water and soils. It will also increase climate change risks by permitting the resumption of broad scale land clearing.

"We therefore refuse to legitimise a wind-back of protections for nature by participating in the current stakeholder consultations any further."

The groups' analysis of the government's proposals has concluded that they would:

- add extinction pressures to the state's 1000 threatened species
- threaten clean reliable water supplies and degrade fertile farmlands through erosion and salinity
- put landmark trees and bushland in towns and suburbs at greater risk
- reduce tree coverage and undermine Australia's efforts to cut carbon pollution
- expand a flawed offsets scheme to try to create bushland cleared under new laws in order to legitimise inappropriate development.

NSW Nature Conservation Council CEO Kate Smolski said: "Now he (Premier Baird) is buckling to the demands of big agribusiness and developers who want weaker nature protection laws to accelerate habitat destruction, the number one cause of wildlife extinctions. This legislation does not protect nature, it facilitates development."

NSW National Parks Association CEO Kevin Evans said: "Nature in NSW is under extreme pressure, with almost 1000 species listed as threatened and bushland rapidly disappearing across the state. Without urgent action, koalas and many of

our other iconic native animals will become extinct in our lifetime. This government has abandoned the building of the National Parks network, and now they are weakening biodiversity legislation across the state. **They either don't understand the crisis facing our wildlife and ecosystems or they simply don't care.** (My emphasis. Ed.) Either way they are out of touch. Thousands of farmers across the state are actively trying to restore habitat for native species, and these laws undermine all their good work."

The group has formed the Stand Up For Nature Coalition. Visit their website for further information and also to sign their petition.

Mapping concerns

The Baird government plans to use a mapping technology, Segmentation Mapping, to map the state's 1500 vegetation communities to fast-track assessment of land clearing proposals under the proposed Biodiversity Conservation Act, in spite of repeated warnings from within the Office of Environment and Heritage and leading ecologists that the technology is flawed.

The government plans to use maps to identify areas of land where development does or does not require development consent to permit clearing. Inaccurate maps threaten to result in destruction of critical habitat, including Endangered Ecological Communities and Threatened Species habitat.

A superior mapping technology, Digital Aerial Photography Identification, uses high resolution, 3D aerial photographs taken from wing aircraft and analysed by experts. This technology results in an accuracy rating of 87%, far higher than that obtained with Segmentation Mapping. The Baird government has not explained why it plans to use the inferior mapping technology when a superior one is available.

Campaign against the 'biodiversity' bill.

Corinne Fisher, former convenor of the Better Planning Network, is co-ordinator of the Total Environment Centre/ Nature Conservation Council campaign against the government's biodiversity law reform agenda. Packed meetings have been held in Sydney and along the coast in opposition to the bill. There have also been protests outside Ministers offices and along the Gore Hill Freeway at Naremburn. On World Wildlife Day, Wednesday 2nd March, 130 community members turned out outside Mike Baird's electorate office in Manly protesting against the proposed new biodiversity bill.

The draft Bill is expected any day, at which time there will need to be submissions from the public, environment groups and the peak bodies, who will also assist member groups with advice on responses.

Further information can be found on the NCC website, www.nature.org.au/campaigns/nature-laws/ Also if you have not already contacted your local member, please do so ASAP. Stress that you expect him/her to represent your views and that you do not accept the government's retrograde proposals. Point out that while the Federal government is investing millions of dollars in planting trees to address Australia's commitment to the COP 21 Paris Agreement, the Baird government prepares to increase tree clearing in rural and urban areas.

A government that is so cavalier with our heritage and/or so beholden to vested interests must be stopped in its tracks.

Another threat to biodiversity - proposed changes to complying development

OK this sounds as boring as can be, and what has it got to do with biodiversity, trees, vegetation, I hear you say.

The Baird Government has put out a Discussion Paper to expand the State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) for Exempt and Code Complying Development introduced in 2008. If enacted it will have a major impact on amenity, and quality of living in low-rise residential areas and will change the way our suburbs look forever.

The proposal is to expand code complying development to allow medium density housing in residential areas to be assessed and certified by private certifiers, rather than go through a development assessment process through councils. The intent is to enable medium density development (ie dual occupancies, manor houses being two storey buildings housing 4 dwellings, and terraces) to be fast-tracked in residential areas

The proposal follows new state priorities introduced by the NSW Government in September 2015. This includes having 90% of housing applications approved within 40 days, and the time to assess state significant projects reduced by 50%.

The State government is proposing to allow:

- 2 dwellings on blocks of 400 sq.m.
- 4 dwellings on blocks of 500 sq.m.
- 10 dwellings on blocks of 600 sq.m.

If a minimum set of standards are met, applications will be deemed to be complying when approved by a private certifier within 10 days of lodgement. Residents will have no right to object. They will be notified AFTER a development is approved.

While the policy was originally intended for exempt and low-impact development, in recent years, the code has been expanded to encourage business growth. It is now proposed to fast-track development.

And of course, all the trees and other vegetation will go, that's if there is anything left after abolition of the Native Vegetation Act. Even large exotic trees green the landscape, provide habitat, as well as environmental services such as temperature modification, carbon sequestration, and soil stabilisation.

At present code complying development is not proposed for heritage conservation areas, foreshore areas and environmentally sensitive areas. A temporary reprieve also applies to scenic areas.

WEPA Office Bearers and Committee 2015

President	Gay Spies
Vice President	Cotter Erickson
Secretary	Vacant
Treasurer and Public Officer	Diana Jones
Publicity Officer	Christina Pender
Committee	Geoff Osborne, Harold Spies

WEPA Matters

Proposed Change to our constitution

At our General meeting on 17th May 2016 it is proposed that the following motion, to make a small change to our Constitution, be put to the members:

MOTION

That Rule (18(v) of the rule headed "18. MEETINGS AND QUORUM" be changed

FROM:

Any five (5) members of the Committee constitute a quorum for the transaction of the business of a meeting of the Committee.

TO:

The number of committee members to constitute a quorum for the transaction of the business of a meeting of the Committee shall be $n/2+1$ (a majority) where n = the number of members of the committee.

This motion, if passed by 75% of the members present, will become a Special Resolution, and therefore requires at least 21 days' notice. A Special resolution is required to change our Constitution.

The meeting is to be held in the Marion Mahony Hall, Glenaeon School, 121 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag, beginning at 8pm.

We need your email address

With the recent increase in postal charges and extension of time for mail delivery, not to mention the consumption of paper, we will need to consider emailing of newsletters in the future.

When we have asked you in the past if you would like to receive your newsletter by email, we received very few positive replies. We know many people like to have a hard copy to read at leisure, wherever they may be - over coffee or a cuppa, or to show to others.

We would therefore like to ask again if you would be agreeable to receiving your newsletter by email, and if you want a hard copy, to print it out yourself. Please indicate on your pink slip if this is the case, and make sure you give your email address. Regardless, your email address is useful for letting you know of events or issues which crop up between newsletters.

If you don't have access to a computer or a printer, then of course we would continue to send your copy by post.

Contributing to the running of WEPA

All community organisations are finding it hard to not only recruit new members, but also to recruit members to become an office bearer or committee member. WEPA is no different.

WEPA has not had a secretary for some time, which makes the job of responding to submissions etc fall onto very few shoulders, or it does not get done at all. The current office bearers and committee have done a sterling job, but they need help and an infusion of new blood. If you value the work that WEPA does, and want it to continue, then please consider putting your hand up at the AGM. You will be warmly welcomed. If you have any queries, please phone Gay on 9958 8569.

Willoughby's Bushland

Reserve Action Plans (RAPs) for 2016

Management of Willoughby's bushland is governed by the Urban Bushland Plan of Management. Individual reserves have a site specific Reserve Action Plan (RAP) with a detailed map, a statement of significance for that reserve, lists of plant communities and wildlife, and detailed on-the-ground-actions for management. RAPs are reviewed annually and fully updated every five years.

The RAPs to be fully updated in 2016 are:

- Artarmon Reserve, Artarmon
- Artarmon Park, Artarmon
- Beverley Blacklock Reserve, Castlecrag
- Clive Park, Northbridge
- Explosives Reserve and HC Press Park, Castle Cove
- Harold Reid Reserve, Middle Cove
- Mowbray Park, Lane Cove North
- OH Reid Memorial Park, Chatswood West

Natural Heritage and Bushland Advisory Committee (NHBAC) Inspection of Artarmon Reserve - 3rd March 2016

A draft RAP is currently being prepared by council officers. The committee was very impressed with the progress of work already undertaken in the reserve which is subject to many pressures. These include: sporting and recreational uses of the oval and bicycle path; the railway line and the expressway. Morning Glory covering the railway easement stands in stark contrast to the native vegetation in the reserve, and is a reminder of the condition of much of the reserve's vegetation before proper management was commenced. The oval, designed as a detention basin, has never flooded. Its border near the expressway has been softened by stands of eucalypts which have been planted and are now seeding into and camouflaging a previously unsightly area of gabions. A seat in their shade provides a pleasant spot from which to watch activities on the oval, which on the morning of our site visit, was the preserve of dog walkers. Community pressure and council intervention and negotiation persuaded Ausgrid to reroute their cables and this has been done with minimal damage instead of the planned intervention cutting through bushland. Probably the areas of greatest impact are behind the houses and along the creek line which require ongoing work before they reach the standard of other areas of the reserve. The children's playground is charming, reminiscent of a Hansel and Gretel play area, with a welcome absence of plastic play equipment. The lower carpark has a vegetated island which provides shade, habitat and visual relief from the former all-asphalt surface of the old carpark. The committee's assessment of the work in the reserve was that the Bushland staff should continue what they are doing as the work is obviously successful.

Council has recently purchased the adjoining Artarmon Bowling Club, which like many others is failing because of an inability to attract new patrons. Consultation on the uses to which the space and buildings can be put will be conducted in the future.

If you haven't been to Artarmon Reserve for a while, pay a visit. It is a very peaceful, pleasant bushland retreat. It even attracts visitors from nearby local government areas - we came across a Lane Cove resident who was enjoying his morning paper in the shade.

The next NHBAC site inspection in May will be of Artarmon Park, nearby, yet not linked to Artarmon Reserve.

eRestore in Jeopardy

The eRestore environmental levy underpins most of the bushland management in Willoughby. Council consulted widely to assess community support before applying for a renewal of the levy and was extremely gratified when it was granted in perpetuity, reflecting the very high standard of the submission.

Now all that is at risk because of the Baird government's policy of forced amalgamation of councils. The levy was granted to Willoughby Council, not to another entity and would have to be renegotiated should amalgamation come to pass.

Council amalgamations

The period for comment on the possible amalgamation of North Sydney and Willoughby Council closed on Friday 26th February. The public hearings at the Boundaries Commission were well attended with the vast majority of speakers opposing amalgamation. In particular, North Sydney residents don't want a bar of Willoughby. North Sydney Council has engaged Professor Brian Dollery of the University of New England's Department of Local Government to prepare its submission. He has been very critical of the amalgamation process from the beginning. However, whether his or any other submissions have any weight, regardless of merit, or whether the Boundaries Commission Review is merely going through to motions to a pre-determined outcome is anybody's guess.

The Minister for Local Government has thrown another spanner into the works with the possible addition of Mosman to the amalgamated North Sydney/Willoughby Council. Accordingly another period of consultation has commenced, to finish on the 8th April. Details of how/where to send submissions and of the public hearings are listed in the Diary Dates on Page 2. If you feel strongly about amalgamation, please put in a submission, and/or speak at the next public hearing.

It is imperative that the funding and staffing for bushland management is not downgraded. Willoughby has established a reputation for excellence in bushland management, both within and outside the LGA, and we cannot afford to see our bushland go into decline, nor to lose the current level of expertise in council's bushland section. Many people and groups have invested enormous amounts of time and effort to protect our bushland and to lobby for its proper management and protection.

Other matters of concern are the diminished representation which will inevitably result if a maximum of 15 councillors has to represent a much larger population. Councillors cannot be expected to be familiar with all of the newly enlarged area they represent, risking less informed decisions in council.

Amalgamation funding How much of the promised transition funding will come from the sale of public property declared surplus post amalgamation?

Mayor of an amalgamated council

Willoughby Council's submission to the Boundaries Commission Review includes a recommendation for a mayor elected by councillors, not by the community.

Residents voted in a referendum several years ago to have a publicly elected mayor. There has been no attempt to consult the community to see if they wish to return to the bad old days when the mayor was elected by councillors, with the concomitant wheeling and dealing - "I'll support your motion if you support me for mayor". Why has the community not

been consulted. The councillors seem to be forgetting who put them there and who they are responsible to.

Another attempt to get rid of Community Advisory Committees

Thirteen speakers were lined up to defend the role of the committees on 8th December 2015, but were summarily dismissed when Mayor Gail Giles Gidney moved a procedural motion that abolition be deferred until there was certainty about amalgamation.

It is interesting that several councillors think the committees provide no benefit to council, yet those councillors never attend committee meetings to see what work they do. A rare, fleeting visit and early departure don't count. Of the seven councillors who put their hands up for the NHBAC, most have never attended. Only Councillors Lynne Saville and Wendy Norton attend regularly and are to be congratulated for taking such an interest in the work of the committee.

Council appears to think that community input can be achieved by such unreliable means as the notorious Have Your Say which facilitates one-off comment by any Tom, Dick or Harry but does not allow for informed discussion and exchange of ideas among experienced individuals who have much to contribute to the committees' work. This applies to other committees, not just to the NHBAC.

Abolition of Council Committees

While the community advisory committees live to breathe another day, two council committees, the Cultural & Civic Committee and the Transport, Access and Environment Committee, got the chop at the council meeting of the 8th December 2015. These are committees of councillors, not community members.

These committees which met in the Banksia Room on Level 6 at council, instead of in the council chamber, were specifically set up to provide a more informal and less threatening environment in which normal rules of debate did not apply and members of the public could ask questions and participate in council affairs. As such they were very successful. The intimidating atmosphere of the council chamber, the need for written permission to apply to speak, the strictly monitored three minute time limit for speakers, had no place at these committee meetings.

Items on the agenda, if not referred by a councillor to full council, could be decided at these meetings, provide the officers recommendation was adopted and a unanimous vote was carried. However the intent was sabotaged by some councillors failing to attend meetings and by the referral by some councillors of all agenda items to full council, thus making the committee meeting superfluous.

The NHBAC reported to the Transport, Access and Environment Committee, so that now its minutes and recommendations will be heard by full council.

Democracy shrinking at Willoughby Council

The recent restructure at Willoughby Council has resulted in there being two open council meetings per month and two closed General Manager Briefings to which members of the public are not admitted. With the abolition of some committees, members of the public now have only the two council meetings at which they can hear debate and can speak for 3 minutes on agenda items.

As Ted Wilson, Secretary of Middle Harbour Progress Association, wrote (in part) in a widely distributed letter, also published in the North Shore Times,

“ It is ironic that whilst the majority of residents oppose amalgamation, based on loss of representation, Willoughby Council has voted to reduce the community's access. A decision to dissolve ten other committees has been deferred.

“As the line in the popular tune *Big Yellow Taxi* goes: “Don't it always go to show, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone”.

State Government restricts access to information

A review by the Information Commissioner, Elizabeth Tydd, shows that the Baird government has significantly cut the flow of information to the public.

NSW government ministers have granted freedom of information requests to only a third of applications in 2014-2015. This is half the level of the previous year.

In all of the applications refused, the excuse was 'Cabinet in Confidence'. The Information and Privacy Report shows this excuse had rarely been used before.

One group, the private sector, was more likely than any other applicants to have access to information granted in full. By contrast community groups were the least likely to gain access to government documents. Community or non-profit groups gained partial or full access in less than half of the applications (46%) compared to 70% of applications by private companies.

The Haven Amphitheatre Castlecrag

The public consultation process on the concept design for the replacement of the stage at the Amphitheatre closed on 26th February.

All the local community groups, as part of the pre-consultation process with the consultants, had agreed independently on design 1A as the most appropriate - what the head dictated perhaps, rather than the heart.

WEPA's concern was always that the integrity of the natural heritage take priority. After all, the Haven is an amphitheatre which happens to be located in a foreshore bushland reserve with a creek running through it.

We congratulated Council on their excellent choice of consultant, and also wish to thank our own representative in the consultation process, Tony Edye, an architect with a commitment to sustainability.

A report will be brought back to Council in March, before the lodgement of a DA for the replacement stage. This will offer the community a further opportunity to comment.

Summer 2015 Survey of Birds in Willoughby LGA

Dr Andrew Huggett of Insight Ecology carried out a survey of birds in Willoughby in December 2015. A total of 25 sites in bushland reserves, parks, road reserves and a cemetery were surveyed during the early mornings, late afternoons and nights.

A detailed report is being prepared for council. The following bird species are some of the highlights of the survey. Simon Brown, Council's Wildlife Officer, condensed the report.

Powerful Owl (threatened): a total of 7 adult and immature, Harold Reid Reserve Ferndale Park, Mowbray Park, and Blue Gum Reserve.

Australian Owlet-nightjar: Recorded in Explosives Reserve - This species was last recorded in Willoughby LGA at Ferndale park in 2000 (Biosphere P/L 2001) and then only from before 1930 (Burton 2000).

Striated Heron: Chatswood Golf Course.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle: Castlecrag Northern Escarpment.

Peregrine Falcon: Clive Park.

Superb Lyrebird: Tunks Park, Explosives Reserve and Castlecrag Northern Escarpment.

Emerald Dove: A rare visitor, Blue Gum Reserve.

Striated Pardalote: A tiny canopy insectivore, detected in North Arm Reserve and Mowbray Park. Burton (2000) described this species as a rare visitor to the LGA.

Red-Browed Finch: Once common throughout Sydney. Northbridge Golf Course, Mowbray Park and Castlecrag Northern Escarpment.

Eastern Yellow Robin: Breeding at several Middle harbour Reserves. This species has disappeared from smaller remnants along Sydney Harbour and Parramatta River.

Mangrove Gerygone: Harold Reid Reserve.

Striated Thornbill: HD Robb Reserve and Mowbray Park.

Variiegated fairy Wren: Breeding in most Middle harbour and Lane Cove reserves during the survey.

Bell Miner: A recent arrival in the LGA - a group was recorded foraging along Lane Cove River at Mowbray park during the survey.

Brown-headed Honeyeater: North Arm Reserve.

Rufous Fantail: a summer breeding small migratory flycatcher in moist gullies in Explosives Reserve, Sugarloaf Creek, Blue Gum Reserve and Artarmon Reserve.

This item has also been published in the CRAG, February 2016, the Newsletter of the Castlecrag Progress Association.

Coal mining in Sydney's water catchment

Centennial Coal secured approval in September 2015 for a 13 year extension of its Springvale Colliery.

The mine which will produce 4.5 million tonnes of coal a year, will be permitted to discharge untreated wastewater into the upper Cox's River, which flows through the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and into Sydney's main reservoir at Warragamba Dam.

An independent hydrologist, Dr Philip Pells, believes that coal mining in Sydney's water catchment is placing at risk sensitive and endangered swamplands that once damaged, can never be repaired.

"Swamps are the canaries in the coal mine - it's the first thing you can tell something is going wrong."

Dr Pells was also critical of the claims made in the environment impact statement by Centennial Coal that helped it secure approval from the Planning Assessment Commission for its extension.

He said there were numerous documented cases of surface cracking from long-wall mining in the Sydney Basin that 'ruptured the beds of creeks, causing dramatic impacts on surface water bodies.' He noted that specific subsidence could not be predicted and impacts might take years to appear. Centennial could not say that this would not occur and the data provided in its EIS was only up until 2012.

Dr Pells and environment groups are also concerned that subsidence caused by coal extraction will inevitably damage groundwater flows, draining wetlands that play an important role in moderating water flows into Sydney's reservoirs.

Keith Muir of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness said 'The Springvale mine approval is based on the false and misleading assertion contained in the EIS that long-wall mining causes negligible impacts to endangered swamps.'

Greens mining spokesperson Jeremy Buckingham said he had seen at first hand the damage caused by fractured surface rocks and the resulting drainage of swamps and creeks. "It's dishonest to claim long-wall mining will not have a significant impact on these environments and their unique hydrology and ecology" he said. "The offsets policy is just greenwash to justify continued destruction of threatened ecosystems."

The approval granted to Centennial Coal is being challenged.

Peter Hannam, SMH 2/3/2106

Fossil Fuel Growth Centre

The federal government has announced the establishment of a \$15.4 million fossil fuel 'growth centre' to help prop up Australia's oil, gas, coal and uranium sectors during what it describes as a 'challenging time' for the industry.

The new centre will be known as the National Energy Resources Australia, or NERA and will work closely with researchers from universities and the newly streamlined CSIRO, the irony of which was not lost on critics of the scheme.

The government does not seem to recognise that the world has changed since the Paris Agreement - which it signed - (but maybe it's too beholden to its political funding support. Ed.)

Sophie Vorath, Renew Economy 25/2/16