



Willoughby Environmental Protection Association

Next Meeting

Tuesday 17 November 2015
Glenaeon School, Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag
(between Charles and Edith Streets and opposite The Parapet)

8 pm

Palm Oil Resistance

Charlotte Richardson

Palm oil is the leading cause of deforestation in Southeast Asia. Every day 300 football fields of virgin rainforest are bulldozed to make way for new palm oil plantations. We are losing more than 50 Orangutans a week.

The burning of cleared forest, often peat land, is the cause of the terrible smoke haze that afflicts large parts of southeast Asia every year and releases untold amounts of carbon.

The good news is there is a solution.. There is no reason why companies can't use already-degraded land for new plantations - there is more than enough degraded land to sustain the demand for palm oil worldwide. It's time for the international community to unite and demand palm oil be created sustainably.

Charlotte Richardson is the NSW Campaign Manager of the Wilderness Society and the Palm Oil Campaign Director of the Orangutan Project.

This is our last speaker meeting for the year, so come along and bring your friends. Join us for supper and a chat afterwards. Contact Gay Spies on 9958 8569 for further information.

Rally for Democracy Wednesday 18th November 12pm Meet at Hyde Park Fountain March to

Parliament House. Councils and residents are being bullied by the Sate Government, despite pre-election promise that there would be no forced amalgamations. **March to keep councils local and oppose amalgamation.**

Peoples Climate March - The Sydney Domain - 1-3pm - Sunday 29th November

On the weekend of 27-29 November people all around the world will be marching in support of action on climate change, for a transition to renewable energy, for secure job creation, for clean air, for a healthy environment and a safe climate. That weekend world leaders will be gathering in Paris in preparation for the Climate talks the following week. Join the march to send a message that the people of Sydney are supporting strong action and expect the same from our leaders.

WEPA's Next speaker meeting will be our AGM on Tuesday 15 March 2016.

INSIDE: Council Amalgamations, Council tries again to disband community advisory committees, Haven Amphitheatre, Ausgrid Tree Trimming Survey, Cash for Containers, Shenhua mine opposition ramps up.

Council Amalgamation

Last Monday night, 9th November 2015, Willoughby Council voted to support a voluntary merger with North Sydney Council.

Councillor Wendy Norton deserves congratulations for standing up for residents and LOCAL government. His position is also supported by Councillor Saville.

Council has succumbed to the bullying by the State Government and gone against the majority recommendation of residents, against the advice of its citizen's panel and against its own proposal to Stand Alone., which it submitted to the government to assert it is Fit for the Future.

IPART handed its 'Assessment of Council Fit for the Future Proposals' to the State Government in October 2015, judging most of the councils in NSW as 'Unfit'. However of the 87 proposals it received, 60 of those were found to be financially fit. Willoughby is in the best or second best financial position of any of the councils in NSW.

Councils were given a 'Fail' mark and labelled 'unfit' because they had not agreed to merge to form mega-councils and thus failed to comply with the threshold criterion of Scale and Capacity. Scale relates to population size and a merger between Willoughby and North Sydney will not achieve this. Blacktown Council was judged 'financially unfit', yet has been assessed as Fit for the Future simply because it passes the scale i.e. population size, criterion.

Although IPART was required to take into account "the social and community context and outcomes for each council" it has ignored the benefits of local government staying local. It has taken on the view of the Independent Local Government Review Panel (IGLRP) that bigger is better, regardless of the fact that there is no evidence to support this and IPART's Terms of Reference do not include it. Thus the process was rigged from the start.

The findings were only made public because of intense pressure from the Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC), Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and individual councils.

Baird's Ultimatum

On October 20, 2015, Premier Mike Baird handed down a 30 day Ultimatum to Councils - Amalgamate or else. He said councils had 30 days to find other councils to amalgamate with.

Mayors were also instructed in a webinar conference that there was to be **no consultation with the community**. In any case there had been no community consultation about IPART's proposed amalgamations. Willoughby was to be part of a mega-council comprising Mosman, North Sydney, Lane Cove Hunters Hill and part of Ryde. So much for democracy.

Councils' responses to the ultimatum are done on line They have been given drop down boxes in which to nominate their

first, second and third merger preferences. There is no opportunity for them to lodge a Stand Alone preference, other than to lodge a nil return.

To reinforce the State Government's heavy hand, councillors yesterday (11/11/15) received letters indicating they were required to come to a census supporting amalgamation. So much for democracy.

What if councils refuse?

Mike Baird has been asked many times what will happen if councils refuse to merge, however he has consistently refused to answer. He refuses to rule out forced amalgamations, even though prior to the state election, both he and our local member Gladys Berejiklian, as well as most of his Liberal MP colleagues, said they do not support forced amalgamations.

No mandate

The Mayor of Lane Cove, Clr Deborah Hutchens has said "Adding further insult to injury is the lack of transparency from the State Government at the last election. They didn't tell the community they would be forcing local government mergers so they have no mandate to unilaterally decrease local democracy". (from the Council's website).

Although the Lower House accepted IPART's assessment, the government does not have the numbers in the Upper House to pass a bill allowing forced amalgamations because Labor, the Greens, the Shooters and Fishers party, the Christian Democrats Party and the Animal Justice Party are all strongly opposed to forced amalgamations.

Upper House Inquiry

After failing to pass the Government's legislation the Upper House set up an inquiry into the Fit for the Future program, releasing the results on 29 October 2015. It strongly rejected IPART's assessments. Its first recommendation was :

"That the Premier and the NSW Government withdraw the statements that 71% of councils in metropolitan Sydney and 56% of regional councils are "unfit".

On the threshold criterion, Scale and Capacity, which has been the blunt instrument used to threaten councils, the Report of the Upper House Inquiry states:

"Scale and Capacity was the criterion for Fit for the Future proposals and, in the committee's view, the most problematic. The key problems with this criterion were that it was ill-defined and difficult to objectively measure. The committee is of the view that any criteria for making assessments about local councils should be clearly defined, objective, measurable and verifiable, particularly if those assessments may lead to widespread structural reforms. It is the committee's opinion that the scale and capacity criterion does not satisfy those parameters. Accordingly it was not an appropriate criterion to include in the Fit for the Future Assessment criteria".

There was a dissenting report by the three Government committee members. Unfortunately, as you would expect.

No support for the Fit for the Future process

The process is no longer supported by Labor, the Greens, the Shooters and Fishers Party, the Christian Democrats party, the Animal Justice Party and independent MPs.

It is not supported by most Councils, Councillors, Mayors and council staff.

It is not supported by LGNSW, the Metropolitan Mayors Forum, and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Local Government.

If the government decides to force amalgamations against the wishes of councils it must send the amalgamation proposals through a rigorous process that must involve the independent Boundaries Commission.

Where is Willoughby?

Many councils have held packed public meetings to gauge community support for the proposed mergers. In our area Mosman, North Sydney, Lane Cove and Ryde have all held public meetings which have rejected mergers and are publicly demonstrating their opposition. Lane Cove and Hunters Hill are festooned with banners and signs on the theme 'Keep Local Government Local'. (The others may have too, but I haven't been there. Ed.)

Unfortunately Willoughby has kept a very low profile. It has failed to hold a public meeting. It has refused to join the non-party- politically aligned Save Our Councils Coalition. In Monday night's debate, a motion to include the words "We oppose forced amalgamation" in council's allotted 50 word comment in their reply to the Government, was lost on the Mayor's casting vote. It also refused to write to the Premier, the Minister and our local member making this point.

One resident speaking on Monday night criticised Council for not being aggressive in pursuing the issue.

In fact Willoughby Council has been missing in action.

Risk for our environment

Among the many things at risk is Council's eRestore Program. On the strength of its submission to the former State Government, Willoughby Council was given permission by the former minister for Local Government to charge residents an Environmental Levy, in perpetuity, to fund the excellent eRestore Program which has huge public support. The General Manager has now asked for a justification of the Program. This may be a foretaste of what is to come.

Few people are better qualified to speak on local government, its functions and finances than **Clr Peter Abelson**, Mayor of Mosman and Chair of SHOROC. I strongly urge you to read his presentation **Role and Future of Local Government: Core Questions and Answers** (16 July 2105) on the Save Our Councils Coalition website.

Here are his conclusions:

- ILGRP on amalgamations was biased, lacked evidence and viewed local government as a branch of state government.
- Yes reforms as outlined above (in his presentation) are desirable

- However financial capacity and scale arguments for merging councils are furphies
- The strategic capacity criteria are vacuous.

The Government's agenda is clearly political. With bigger councils it will be easier to get party members on to councils and then get them to toe the party line. Most likely the Government's development agenda. It will be much harder for independents to fund and campaign for election to bigger councils. Our representation will also diminish considerably. Only 15 councillors will be allowed on any council. So much for democracy.

What you can do:

Write or email the Premier, the Minister for Local Government and Member for Willoughby, Gladys Berejiklian.

Attend the Rally for Democracy on 18th November

Haven Amphitheatre Castlecrag

There was general consensus among local community groups on one of two concept designs prepared by architects employed by Council. However the Haven Amphitheatre Committee had objected to relocation of the storage area from under the stage.

The consultants have now presented to a meeting of representatives of all the groups a revised version, Option 1A, which keeps the basic shape of the original but raises the stage and locates the Green Room and the storage areas under the stage rather than as a separate facility against The Scarp retaining wall. However some storage may be retained in that location.

The plans were provided at different scales and did not provide a comparison, making it difficult to visualise the variation between the original Option 1 and the newer Option 1A.

Although members had not been able to study or consult with their groups beforehand, there was pressure from council to reach a decision. After considerable discussion general consensus was reached, pending an informal get together this weekend. The architect will provide a plan with the original stage area overlaid on the current proposal for the stage.

The estimated cost for Option 1A are \$1.225 M for the stage and \$225,000 for the storage. For Option 2, the estimated costs are \$745,000 for the stage and 368,000 for the storage area. This does not include the necessary work on stabilising nor for the seating, which could possibly be carried out with grant money.

Option 1A, which is still a concept design, will now go to Council for approval, then be placed on exhibition for public comment. If it passes all those hurdles, a DA will then be prepared for Council.

Council tries again to disband its community advisory committees

WEPA has previously reported on Council's September 2014 attempt to abolish its advisory committees. The author of that report graciously admitted, after hearing members from various committees talk about the value they provided free of charge to Council, that she hadn't realised what they did. Needless to say, neither the committees nor the community had been consulted.

A further report was promised plus an undertaking to consult committees and the public. A Have Your Say survey was conducted late last year, of which few people were aware, and those few who were, dismissed it as disparaging. The results of that survey, contrary to normal council practice, have never been made public. Up to now, council has always prided itself, justifiably, on its policy of openness and transparency.

Following the council restructure, many former employees have departed, and a new report has been prepared, linked to the City Strategy with the title, "**The Community can participate in City Life**". It then goes on to recommend dissolving most of the committees., Rather an Orwellian touch.

The report seems to be based on the flawed 2014 report. Like its forerunner, it appears not to understand either the purpose or the work of the different committees. It assumes any advice can be project based. The councillors view is that the committees don't do anything. However, with some notable exceptions, they don't attend.

The Natural Heritage and Bushland Advisory Committee for example, has comprehensive Terms of Reference which call for three councillor members. Seven councillors have registered for the committee, most of whom have never attended. The Chair, Councillor Saville, and Deputy Co-Chair, Councillor Norton, attend regularly. A couple of others have blown in occasionally, but have never lasted out a meeting. Which is a pity. They could learn a lot.

The committees proposed for the chop are :

- Natural Heritage and Bushland Advisory Committee
- Griffin Reserve Advisory Committee
- Companion Animals Advisory Committee
- Sustainability Reference Group
- Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Choir Advisory Committee
- Bicycle Consultative Committee

Some other committees are recommended to become reference committees for one-off projects. This seems to miss the point.

Nine members from different committees registered to address council on 26 October, only for the matter to be deferred until early next year. As some councillors sensibly realised, with amalgamation in the wind, this was hardly the time to disband the committees.

Ausgrid Tree Survey

Are you happy with the way our street trees are trimmed? Or do you think they are being butchered? Perhaps you think that this work is carried out by Council. Council however has no say in the process. Ausgrid is conducting a survey to find out what people think. In none of the options proposed do they consider undergrounding of cables. To complete the survey go to www.surveymonkey.com/r/ausgridtreetrimming

Cash for Containers

In February 2015, the Premier Mike Baird committed to a world's best practice Container Deposit scheme by the end of 2015. The Boomerang Alliance, headed by Jeff Angel from the Total Environment Centre, has been campaigning for far too many years to have such a scheme introduced in NSW. South Australia has had Container Deposit legislation for at least 20 years, but the beverage industry has fought hard wherever and whenever other states have tried to introduce similar legislation.

The Boomerang Alliance has come up with a detailed model, based on world's best practice, which it believes is sound, sustainable and affordable. It is too long to discuss here, but you can find it at www.boomerangalliance.org.au They would also appreciate it if you can endorse their model.

Shenhua mine opposition ramps up

On the weekend of the 6-7 November the people of the Liverpool Plains held a Harvest Festival. Everyone was invited and over 600 people turned up. The mine will not only damage aquifers and destroy valuable farmland, the second most fertile soil on earth after the Ukraine, according to Tony Windsor, former independent member for New England. It will also damage sacred aboriginal sites.

At a workshop with local aboriginal people a local Gomeroi woman spoke about how aboriginal people are no longer able to visit many of the sacred sites. Shenhua plans to remove the grinding grooves off site, then dig their open-cut coal pit and then put the grinding grooves back. These fantasy decisions can only be made by people who are totally removed from the real world, and approved by bureaucrats who are devoid of any understanding of what is involved in mine rehabilitation.

The dealings with Shenhua were started by Ian Macdonald, who was found by ICAC to have corruptly issued mining licences in the Hunter Valley. Tony Windsor proposed mass civil disobedience to stop the mine. He urged these protests to be stage under the leadership of the indigenous people.

Jeremy Buckingham, the Greens mining spokesman, exposed the Nationals double standards. He very clearly set out how the state and federal governments could stop the mine in a matter of hours if they chose to.

A motion in the Senate this week to reverse federal government approval of the mine and asking the NSW Government not to grant a mining licence was defeated by the Liberals, Nationals and Labor.

