



# Wallumetta

The Newsletter of Ryde-Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna  
Preservation Society Inc.

**APRIL 2020 - No. 280**

## PRESIDENT'S NOTE

At the Annual General meeting of the Society it is usual for the President to provide a report on the activities of the Society during the previous year. As the AGM has been postponed until further notice I would like to summarise some of the highlights during the period from the AGM in March 2019.

Ryde Council recently introduced its response to the Commonwealth *Biosecurity Act 2015* in respect of weeds and has implemented a Biosecurity Weeds Policy. The Society reviewed the policy and provided comment to Council officers. Interestingly this Act was used by the Commonwealth Government to ban certain international departures from Australia by Australians.

We have made representations to the NSW Planning Minister about a bill introduced into Parliament which if passed, will significantly limit the powers of planning approval bodies in NSW to address climate change impacts of new coal mining projects. See the EDO report in this edition of Wallumetta for more information.

The Society has been active in seeking to protect the critically endangered Sydney Turpentine & Ironbark forest on the Ivanhoe estate development at North Ryde. The developer has changed its plans following representations by the Society and this will save a lot more of the forest. We are pursuing the matter further to save all of the forest.

Another big issue that we have acted on is the proposal to raise the height of Warragamba Dam. This will flood a portion of the World Heritage site that surrounds the dam. We have made representations opposing the increase. No final decision as yet by the NSW Government.

We have been active on local issues also such as the Plan of Management for Boronia Park, protecting Bundara Reserve, the Ryde Council Heritage Review and Ryde Council's General Plan of Management for Crown Lands.

In respect of the Field of Mars we have negotiated with Council about improving the surface of the road leading to the Centre and construction of storm water pits to reduce erosion from runoff from the Visitor Centre. We have actively participated in the Consultative Committee for the Field of Mars and volunteers have staffed the Visitor Centre every weekend.

These are only a few of the highlights for the last year and an equally active Society is needed for the coming year. One of the initiatives that I propose is developing our capacity to utilise communication technology more effectively such as improving our website and using telephone and video conferencing. Members' inputs on this proposal are most welcome.

Frank Breen,  
President

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## Environmental Defenders Office Reports

*Our Society supports the work of the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO), a legal centre dedicated to protecting the environment. It is staffed by highly qualified professional lawyers and support personnel. Recently, we received these reports from David Morris, Chief Executive Officer:*

### 1. Adani

On Thursday 6 February 2020 in the Brisbane Magistrates Court, Adani admitted to providing false and misleading information to the Queensland Government over its land-clearing activities, after an investigation sparked by evidence compiled by our client, Coast and Country.

EDO has long been at the forefront of the legal battles over Adani's Carmichael Coal Mine and other proposed mines in Queensland's Galilee Basin. We have acted to ensure both governments and corporations respect the rule of law, and stood up in court time and time again on behalf of our clients to defend the Galilee's unique wildlife, water and landscapes.

In its 2018 Annual Return, Adani indicated it had done no land clearing at its controversial Carmichael mine site. Evidence subsequently presented to the Queensland Government by EDO and Coast and Country – including high-definition aerial footage – showed clearly that extensive land-clearing had already taken place at the site... The Brisbane Magistrates Court convicted and sentenced Adani for a criminal offence under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* (Qld) for providing false and misleading information to the Department of Environment and Science.

This comes after lawyers from EDO and Environmental Justice Australia wrote to the CEO of Adani contractor Siemens, outlining this case as well as previous environmental breaches by the company. Siemens' contract states that it has "the right to pull out of the contract if our customer violates the very stringent environmental obligations."

### 2. Rocky Hill Coal Mine + NSW Government action following lobbying by the Minerals Council

One year ago, EDO secured a landmark legal victory in the NSW Land and Environment Court with the refusal of the proposed **Rocky Hill coal mine** on the doorstep of the village of **Gloucester** in the New South Wales Upper Hunter. A key factor in the win was the mine's potential impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Since then, the powerful Minerals Council has been lobbying the NSW Government to change the law to make victories like this much harder to achieve. In October 2019, the NSW Planning Minister introduced a bill into Parliament. If passed, it will significantly limit the powers of planning approval bodies in NSW to address climate change impacts of new coal mining projects.

It's no secret that this new bill is a direct attempt to counter the influence of the NSW Land and Environment Court's historic decision, and the NSW Independent Planning Commission's more recent and equally significant decision to refuse a massive new open cut coal mine in the picturesque Bylong Valley, as well as placing conditions on the approval of the United Wambo "super pit". Both decisions (resulting from work by EDO lawyers) cited climate change impacts as grounds for refusal and sent shock waves through the mining industry.

The proposed bill shows that the NSW Government is still not serious about taking climate action and in fact is actively working to prevent the proper consideration and regulation of the impacts of coal projects that contribute to dangerous climate change in NSW and across the globe.

The Environmental Defenders Office is committed to taking government and fossil fuel companies to court on behalf of communities in pursuit of climate justice, and improving laws and policies so that they not only protect people and the planet, but maintain and restore nature.

### 3. Prosecution of Irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin

Another positive outcome for the EDO was the prosecution of irrigators charged with an offence relating to pumping water from the Barka/Barwon-Darling River in 2016 in contravention of an approval condition. The Court found the irrigators guilty, with a sentence to be handed down soon. The Court's verdict, and the prosecution itself, come after years of work by the Environmental Defenders Office, our clients and community members; highlighting serious issues with compliance and enforcement in the Murray Darling Basin.

EDO lawyers first raised these matters with the then regulator, WaterNSW, in April 2017, based on information obtained under Freedom of Information laws from the NSW Government. Despite this, the regulator failed to take appropriate action in response, so EDO filed a civil enforcement case on behalf of the Inland Rivers Network (IRN) – a community organisation advocating for healthy rivers, wetlands and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin.

It was not until March 2018 that WaterNSW commenced its prosecution. Whilst the prosecution played out in Court, IRN's civil enforcement proceedings were put on hold, then discontinued.

IRN is satisfied that these proceedings have resulted in many beneficial outcomes, not only the prosecution brought by WaterNSW, but also the broader reformation of the NSW water management system. Indeed, following the commencement of the civil proceedings, a new independent regulator - the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) - was created, and is now playing a much more active role in ensuring compliance and enforcement of NSW water laws.

Back when EDO brought the civil enforcement case on behalf of IRN, there was little compliance and enforcement action being taken by the regulator in NSW. EDO lawyers identified a number of issues and stepped in to ensure that the voices of the concerned citizens of the Basin were heard in Court, at a time when the NSW Government was failing to take appropriate action.

The information uncovered also formed the basis of **ABC Four Corners program "Pumped"**, which first brought concerns regarding the mismanagement of water resources in the Murray Darling Basin - and resulting damage to local communities and wildlife - into sharp public focus.

You can [subscribe to EDO's fortnightly e-bulletin Insight here](#).

#### **... and Action on Adani by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF)**

ACF has taken on the federal government again on their failure to use the water trigger in Adani's plans to draw 12.5 billion litres of water from the Suttor River in Queensland each year for their coal mine.

In a Sydney Morning Herald article, *Federal Court challenge to Adani's plan to pump river water*, Environment editor Peter Hannam wrote that the Morrison government failed to activate the so-called 'water trigger' when assessing the proposed Adani coal mine in Queensland. The water trigger, introduced by the Rudd-Gillard government in mid-2013, was meant to require the government to assess impact on water of all large coal mines and coal seam gas developments.

Lawyers acting for the Australian Conservation Foundation will test the government's decision not to refer Adani's North Galilee Water Scheme, a pipeline supplying the mine, for a thorough assessment as intended by the law. The federal government treated Adani's plan to be a pipeline that was not, and did not involve, a "large coal mining development".

See the full article here: <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/morrison-government-faces-legal-challenge-over-adani-pipeline-plan-20200316-p54an6.html>

## **HOW YOU CAN HELP BIRDS AFTER THE 2019-20 FIRES** - Tips from the [Birds in Backyards](#) team...

Here are a few ways to help birds in the aftermath of fires and also looking into the future.

### **Water**

Providing water in your yard that birds (and other wildlife) can safely access is an easy but important way to help out. Pot saucers, tubs, buckets, hanging pots, upside down bin lids, ceramic dishes, clam shell pools – all make great options (avoid metal as it can heat up too much). Different depths and types of baths provide lots of options for different birds. Be sure to:

- Place them in the shade around the garden at various heights
- Keep them close to shrubs and trees so birds can have an escape route
- Put rocks, a brick or a branch in the water so anything that falls in can climb out
- Change the water daily or whenever it gets hot
- Keep cats indoors and if you have a dog, place the baths in an area where it cannot access
- Check pools (including the skimming box) throughout the day and provide a wildlife ramp or heavy rope as an escape route if something falls in

### **Supplementary food**

You can provide food for birds but there can be issues that you should be aware of so be sure to:

- Keep feeding stations impeccably clean.
- Remove food after about an hour (less for nectar mixes as they spoil quickly).
- Provide a range of foods for different types of birds (and on different feeding stations). Most of the birds we tend to feed are the big and bossy ones; don't forget about the little insectivores, honeyeaters and finches that may be struggling. Try: mealworms or other invertebrates, fruit, nectar mixes, seed and chopped up dog food rolls.
- Avoid bread (it's just a filler that provides minimal nutrition), honey/water mixes, straight sunflower seeds (which are very fatty) and mince. Mince is nutritionally not complete and also sticks to beaks, sometimes causing bacterial infections.
- Ensure stations are out of reach of cats, dogs and other potential threats.
- Place stations in a quiet space for shy birds to use.

Feeding shouldn't be a long-term solution. As habitat recovers and new plants establish, birds will be able to find food naturally and you can taper off your feeding efforts.

### **Shade**

Don't worry if birds are seeking shelter in your yard but not drinking, despite there being water available. Birds will open their beaks, drop and open their wings in order to cool down. Give them some space and allow them to rest. Observe them from a distance. You can use a spray bottle to mist vegetation and help create a cool patch and put up shelters to create some extra shady spots.

+ More from [Birdlife Australia](#)...

### **FUEL-REDUCTION BURNS**

In the wake of the widespread bushfires that have ravaged extensive areas of Australia this summer, there has been a renewed call for more fuel-reduction burns. BirdLife Australia acknowledges that planned, fuel-reduction burning can be an important tool in reducing fire risk, particularly around towns and other important infrastructure. We support its use where evidence indicates it will reduce risk to life and property or help to maintain healthy ecosystems. Nevertheless, in some situations, fuel-reduction burns are not an appropriate action.

Inappropriate fire regimes (too much or too little fire) can increase the risk of causing the extinction of birds and other wildlife and their habitats. This can lead to local or global extinctions.

Further, too frequent burning can lead to a loss of less fire-tolerant species and may promote the abundance of plant species that respond positively to fire. This often changes the structure of the habitat, and the species which rely on particular structural characteristics can be adversely affected. And many of the plants which are tolerant of fire are typically highly flammable, so that, over time, inappropriate planned burning can actually increase the fire risk.

### **Area-driven targets**

BirdLife Australia has serious concerns about hectare target programs for fuel-reduction burns. Fire risk management is complex and fire management programs that focus too heavily on planned burning ignore this complexity. The application of a simplistic policy that fails to take into account the specific needs of each particular bioregion could spell disaster for our flora and fauna.

Area-driven targets can lead to certain regions and ecosystems being targeted simply to 'get the hectares up' because they are remote, easily burnt or extensive. Also, there is greater pressure to conduct burns under marginal weather conditions. This increases the risk that a burn might escape its boundaries or that a planned cool burn may become a hot burn that leads to a loss of habitat elements that are not easily replaced, such as mature trees and hollows.

We hope that, in responding to devastating bushfires, Australian states and territories will implement strategic policies and programs that focus on reducing risk to communities rather than adopting simplistic, target-based programs.

### **A window for burns**

Fire scientists and government agencies recognise that the annual 'window' for conducting burns safely is diminishing as the climate changes; burns are now being conducted in winter and spring as well as autumn. Burning in spring carries additional risk as this is the time when many species are nesting or when juvenile birds are highly vulnerable.

Some demand that remnant roadside vegetation be cleared, despite there being scant evidence that roadside vegetation exacerbates the severity of bushfires. In many country areas, **roadsides provide the only habitat for available wildlife**, and allow native animals to move across an otherwise hostile landscape of open paddocks. Birds often rely on roadside habitat and are threatened by removal of leaf litter, logs and shrubs, as well as fragmentation of their habitat through fuel-reduction burns or ploughing. Roadsides require sensible management to achieve equilibrium between fire prevention and preserving conservation values.

### **NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT INQUIRY**

URGENT ATTENTION! - NSW Government has commissioned an [independent expert inquiry](#) into the 2019-2020 bushfire season to provide input to NSW ahead of the next bushfire season.

The catastrophic bushfires which burnt swathes of eastern NSW, as well as parts of eastern Queensland and Victoria, provide a timely opportunity to reassess our approach to fire management, particularly in light of the devastating impacts to natural ecosystems and the important fauna and flora which rely on the landscapes where they occur.

NSW has been planning and implementing fire management practices that consider life, property and the environment and the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) strongly upholds the view that management of vegetation for bushfire should continue to be ecologically sustainable while protecting life and property. **Submissions are open until 17 April 2020.**

NCC is preparing a submission guide which we intend to circulate separately next week.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME? – 7. OUR LOCAL ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

At the outset we must recognise that Aboriginal culture was exclusively oral and the languages had never been written down in any form before the arrival of Europeans. So, when European settlers started writing aboriginal words, a variety of spellings were used and these may have varied according to both the speaker's enunciation and the perception of the listener.

This is why the clan name of our local Aborigines is written in a variety of ways including, most commonly, "*Wallumedegal*", "*Wallumattagul*" and "*Wallumetta-gal*", the latter being the spelling used for our newsletter. There is no definitively correct spelling for these or any other words. The *Wallumedegal* were part of the regional grouping, speaking related dialects, known as Dharug.

***Wallumedegal*** is our starting point, and the word comes in three parts:

- *Wallu* means "snapper fish", a basic diet of the locals, caught and cooked while still afloat in their bark canoes on the Lane Cove River and Parramatta River.
- *Mede, Matta* or *Metta* means "place"
- *Gal* or *Gul* means "men" or "people"

In his journal in 1790, Lieutenant Philip Gidley King wrote: *The females... are distinguished by the word "leon" added to the name that distinguishes the Man – it is imagined that the word "Gal" signifies tribe and the word preceding it is the word of distinction – perhaps it is the place where the tribe resides.*

So the name *Wallumedegal* means "Snapper-fish place people"... and it is tautological to say (as many do) "*Wallumedegal* people". Our Society's base is in their territory, so our newsletter name *Wallumetta* is appropriate, meaning simply "Place of snapper fish".

Another significant name is "***Waratah***" or "***Warada***" (as it is spelt for the name of a loop track in the Field of Mars Reserve). This Dharug word applies to the species of plant identified by the scientific name *Telopea speciosissima*. The track was so named because it passed by the only two endemic waratahs in the reserve. Sadly, over ten years ago some mountain bike riders did considerable damage to part of the bushland in constructing an illegal track and the waratah there has not been seen since, so it is possible that only one survives.

***Moocooboola*** or *Moocooboolah* means "Waters meet". It refers to the Hunters Hill / Woolwich peninsula where the Lane Cove River and Parramatta River meet. The name is best known for Hunters Hill's Moocooboola festival, and has had other uses including the name of the luxury tourist coach operated by the former North & Western Bus Lines (originally Hunters Hill Bus Co.) The official Scout name for our district is Moocooboolah, as shown on this badge:



***Bennelong*** is the name of our federal government electorate. It honours the famous Wangal Aborigine, Woollarawarre Bennelong. He came from the Manly area. After associating with Governor Phillip and travelling to England where he remained for three years, Woollarawarre Bennelong became homesick, returned to Sydney, and settled on the land occupied by farmer and brewer James Squire near Kissing Point. Reportedly, Bennelong returned to living a traditional Aboriginal, rather than European, lifestyle and presumably associated with *Wallumedegal* during this phase of his life. Bennelong died at Kissing Point on 3 January 1813 and was buried there with his last wife, Boorong. According to the Australian Museum, Bennelong was a courageous, intelligent, vain and quick-tempered man but good with children and something of a comedian.

Acknowledgement: Much information is from "*Wallumedegal – an Aboriginal History of Ryde*" by Keith Vincent Smith, published by City of Ryde Council, 2005.

(This book is at City of Ryde Council libraries; there is also a copy at Field of Mars Visitor Centre.)

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD OF MARS

### Extreme Weather

We welcomed the rain that came with the East Coast Low during February, changing fire weather warnings into flood warnings. On 9 February torrential rain combined with a King Tide of almost 2m to flood Buffalo Creek to the level of the bus turning bay, as you can see photographed here. Water was also level to the Visitor Centre veranda but fortunately not high enough to flood inside the building.



During the night of Tuesday 18 February Sydney suffered a severe thunderstorm and high winds brought down some trees in the reserve, blocking in several places the Sand Track, Fire Trail and high end of the Strangers Creek Track. We promptly removed trunks and branches to clear these tracks so walkers could pass through and not divert around, thus damaging unspoilt adjacent bushland.



We noticed some impacts on fauna, too, with very few leaf-curl spiders seen. Fortunately the birds and reptiles are still around, and another wallaby was sighted recently. *(Photo by Pamela Ward)*

### Wildlife Protection Area



The classification and associated signage plus Council monitoring appears to be having a positive impact, with fewer dogs and cats being encountered in the reserve. We are regularly checking on the new signs, as “No Dogs” signs had a habit of disappearing and, after being there for only a few months, the “Wildlife Protection Area” sign vanished from the main gate at Pittwater Rd.

### Shared User Path Construction (Pittwater Rd: High St Boronia Park to Rene St East Ryde)

Work commenced recently. It has involved the relocation of 8 Ausgrid power poles, rock cutting, embankment stabilization and retaining walls, drainage works, and removal of some trees (not in the vicinity of the reserve). There was some concern about trees being marked with crosses but it turns out they were not earmarked for removal. We received assurance that the drainage works will not adversely impact the saltmarsh area of Buffalo Creek.

When the project is completed, it should be possible to walk and cycle safely along Pittwater Rd. We look forward to there being a safe path linking the Field of Mars Reserve with High St Boronia Park, which will benefit visitors using the route 538 Gladesville-Woolwich bus service.

City of Ryde Council has undertaken the entire project linking Epping Rd North Ryde to Victoria Rd Gladesville at a cost of \$10 million, with a grant from Transport for NSW.

### Bushcare

Strangers Creek Group moved operations and is now attending to the riparian vegetation in the vicinity of the access path between 34 & 36 Finch Avenue. During February all other groups were functioning as normal, weather permitting, with a focus on ensuring native plants survive intact after the extreme weather, and controlling weeds which are reappearing now that the weather is more favourable for them. Unfortunately, on 16 March the City of Ryde Council decided that all volunteer bushcare work must cease indefinitely owing to the coronavirus crisis. Since then, each site is being monitored by a member of Council staff who intends to take action as needed to maintain each site so our good work is not lost.

## Visitor Centre

In the present crisis, with sports and many other activities suspended indefinitely, walking and enjoying nature is one pastime that people can still enjoy, and it can be of great benefit for a person's physical and mental wellbeing. It is also a good way for children to burn off excess energy! For these reasons we have decided to keep the Visitor Centre open for as long as possible. It is not difficult for our volunteers to maintain good hygiene and social distancing. However, each volunteer decides individually whether they consider it advisable for them to continue working shifts at the Centre. Signs advise members of the public that our opening hours may be reduced or suspended, as well as repeating government recommendations about measures to curb the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, numbers of walkers passing by and coming to the Visitor Centre for information, refreshments and other assistance are at a record high! On Sunday 22 March we recorded 45 people visiting the Centre; many were couples and young families exploring the Field of Mars for the first time. Our maps were in high demand.

Members are always welcome to join our team of volunteers to keep the Visitor Centre open on weekends. We do four-hour shifts. No special skills are required, and Alfred will happily provide the small amount of training needed. Frequency and times of each person's shifts are negotiated individually, according to preferences and availability. If you are interested please phone Alfred on 02 9879 6067.

## EVENTS

- **Brush Turkey Workshop** was originally scheduled to be on Sunday 8 February 2020, but the flooding of Buffalo Creek forced its postponement to Saturday 29 February – same day as...
- **Water Sensitive Garden Workshop** organised by City of Ryde Council.
- **Clean Up Australia Day** was on the following day, Sunday 1 March. At Field of Mars our site coordinator Alfred organised a team of members to clean along Buffalo Creek. Six volunteers removed rubbish around Buffalo Creek between Pittwater Road and the Visitor Centre, and around the Monash Road bridge. As usual, most rubbish was plastic bottles etc., probably coming mostly from stormwater drains; actual visitors to the Field of Mars are generally very respectful of the environment and avoid leaving litter. We will probably organise another, interim Clean Up in coming months, provided that coronavirus regulations allow it. If you are interested, please contact Alfred on 02 9879 6067.

**ALL OTHER EVENTS HAVE BEEN INDEFINITELY POSTPONED OR CANCELLED...** including:

- our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and
- Bird Walks with Cathy Goswell

We will let you know when these and other events may be rescheduled.

## Win this bright Yarnknit\* rug!

Tickets \$2 each / 3 for \$5  
available at the Field of Mars Visitor Centre.

\* Rug hand-knitted and kindly donated to RHHFFPS by the Holy Spirit Yarnknit Group of North Ryde.

