



## **Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 28 MARCH 2019**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019**

The society has had another energetic year in helping protect the natural environment of the Blue Mountains. Last year I commented that we were working with the challenge that current governments were often unsympathetic to environmental values and concerns. A significant feature of this year was the two upcoming elections. From mid 2018 we took on election-related activities to raise awareness of local environmental issues when people cast their vote. I think this focus gave us a feeling of optimism and extra energy while we still addressed emerging issues as usual.

#### **The state of your Society**

Our membership numbers have continued to fluctuate around 800. This is a good number for a regional organisation and it is one of our strengths. Financially, we are in a good position. (Treasurer's report follows)

As a volunteer organisation, we are fortunate to have people with a great range of skills and a depth of learning and experience in many disciplines who investigate and advocate on environmental issues on behalf of the society.

I believe that the Society is in a good position for the coming year.

#### **Our Activities**

##### **Events**

We had good attendances at our the educational and campaign events:

- Threatened Species Day, an inspiring range of speakers on what Threatened Species mean to them,
- Dr Anne Young talked about Upland Swamps, to a full house at the Hut which sparked a lot of interest and discussion;
- A community workshop with the Environmental Defenders Office on reporting suspected illegal land clearing;
- Two election related events:

- *Cleaner Greener Blue Mountains* Meeting in October where we and Nature Conservation Council reviewed environmental issues at state and local level and the society presented our proposals to address these issues locally;
- the **Protect our National Parks rally** in February focussing on how to better protect our national parks and increase National Parks and Wildlife Services' capability and staffing. Speakers including National Parks Association, ParkWatch, Colong Foundation and Joan Domicelj on World heritage;
- The 2019 Mick Dark Talk for the Future, with Varuna Writers Centre, featured Dr Charles Massy on regenerative farming and climate change. and
- We held an informal Sunset Get Together with songs and poetry.

We thank our Events Coordinator for her work to make these events successes together with the Threatened Species Officer and the Land Use and Election Subcommittees.

### **Our Native Plant Nursery**

While 2018 /19 was a challenging year for the nursery with wind and hail damage and unusually high temperatures, the nursery remained productive and achieved good plant sales.

However, the nursery operations remain constricted because of lack of room. The society has succeeded in having our nursery included in Council's draft masterplan for Lawson Crown Lands. **We urge you to vote online to support the option of our nursery being located at the former club house before the 18 April.** (Report tabled)

### **Campaigns**

**Our campaigns** have continued to be fuelled by the considerable energy and expertise from the Land Use, National Parks and Protect the Gardens of Stone sub-committees.

**The *Leave Radiata Plateau Wild*** campaign continued with a full-page open letter of support in the Gazette and an onsite briefing of the Minister for Environment on the Plateau's values. This led to the society having a more detailed discussion with NPWS. NPWS are now seeking a valuation which is a step towards possible negotiation, however, the minister did not commit to negotiating the purchase as Labor did. We will be writing to the new Minister for the Environment once announced. However, I'd also like to acknowledge the efforts of our local member, Trish Doyle, in getting the acquisition of Radiata Plateau into the ALP's platform when Blue Mountains is not a marginal seat.

**Gardens of Stone Alliance** (the Society together with Colong Foundation and Lithgow Environment Group) has made advances in broadening support for the protection of the Gardens of Stone as a state conservation area. This has particularly been achieved

through the work of the retired unionists association who have visited, held events in the area and had discussions with their union colleagues

The alliance is also completing two projects:

- *Destination Pagoda*: a practical and costed visitor plan that proposes creating new visitor opportunities in a Gardens of Stone state conservation area which is centred on Lithgow. and
- *Gardens of Stone: living Landscape* film which tells the story of the campaign and how the future of this spectacular area hangs in the balance.

**We urge you to come to the launch of the plan and film locally on Thursday 11 April at 6.30 pm in the Carrington Ballroom at Katoomba.** There is a booking link on our website. .

### **Successes**

- *(Katoomba Christian Centre)*. The Society objected to the extensive redevelopment and expansion of the Katoomba Christian Centre not far from the escarpment. Impacts included significant tree and habitat loss, disrupting migratory birds and exceeding building height and site coverage limits. The Society also appeared before the Sydney, Western City Planning Panel who refused development consent for the proposed redevelopment.
- *(Woodford land clearing case)*. The Society alerted Council to the suspected illegal clearing of native vegetation at Woodford, after being alerted by Society members, and continued to follow up with Council during the investigation. The Society is very pleased Council successfully prosecuted the case in court.
- *On Keeping toxic mine discharge out of the Coxs River. World Heritage area and Sydney's drinking water catchment.* Centennial Coal and Energy Australia are well progressed on the construction of the large \$200M reverse osmosis Water Treatment Plant which will remove the excessive salt from Springvale's mine water discharge and will allow its re-use at Mt Piper Power Station. At a recent site inspection, the companies said they will be able to turn off the discharge to Coxs River on the due date of 1 July 2019 (although the plant won't be entirely operational for possibly another six months). This treatment is a win for the environmental campaigns we have been part of for many years.

## **Emerging issues**

- raising Warragamba Dam wall - we are a supporting organisation in the *Give a Dam* campaign;
- the real possibility of a commercial lease for Katoomba Airfield. On this, the society's inquiries uncovered that the Department of Industry had granted a licence over the airfield without any community consultation into the future use of this crown land surrounded by national park and despite its controversial past; and
- the Bells Quarry proposal.

## **State election activities**

The society has put considerable planning and effort into raising awareness of environmental issues in the state election. We have run two events, produced and analysed candidates' questionnaires, advertised the results and lobbied political parties regarding issues we wanted them to commit to. This is all documented on our website.

We also had the challenge of complying with new legislation requiring us to identify expenditure on electoral activities in the six month period up to the date of the state election. .

As you know, the state elections were held last week and the results, at least in the lower house, are known. We will be reviewing our activities for lessons learned for future campaigns.

However, the outcome means that the possibility of achieving many changes we identified as needed has been lost. Such things as

- having a concrete plan for climate change and transition to renewables;
- more recurrent funding for NPWS;
- more funding for pests and weeds controls in national parks;
- restoring the water quality tests (NORBE) on discharges to Sydney drinking water catchment;
- not raising the Warragamba dam wall

We will continue campaigning and looking for new ways to advance these issues.

## **Operational matters**

### **The Society's access to the Conservation Hut**

In 2018 we confirmed our continuing access to this building, the Conservation Hut, when National Parks and Wildlife Service entered into a new lease with the company operating the café. The society has a long history with using the Hut and its predecessor at this site as its headquarters, meeting room and storeroom for decades.

It is important for the society to maintain the use of the Hut and our presence at this much visited site at Wentworth Falls.

Our organisation has run through the excellent efforts of our Administration Officer, Membership Officer, Minutes Secretary, Events Coordinator, Treasurer, as well as our two Vice Presidents.

Our core activities of running a native plant Nursery, Bush Walking Program and other nature based activities have continued under the management of our Nursery Manager and volunteers, Walks Convenor, all the walks and study group coordinators. We have continued to keep our members up to date on our activities and informed on environmental issues. This is through the work of our Hut News Editor, Webmaster, Membership Secretary on weekly emails and several Management Committee members on Facebook and Twitter

### **Management Committee Departures**

Four committee members are not renominating for positions on the Management Committee: Valda Low, Hugh Brougham, Pheobe Coster and Annette Coulter. We thank them for their contributions to the society.

Finally, I will not be renominating for a third year as President. I have been honoured to be President for the last two years. The society is a strong and committed organisation and an important voice in our local community. I thank my colleagues on the Management Committee and subcommittees for their support.

Madi Maclean  
President