



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc Annual General Meeting 2020

President's Annual Report

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin this report by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Gundungurra and Darug peoples and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I would also like to thank all of our members for being involved in and supporting the work of the Society. Our voice comes through our strength in numbers and the efforts of us collectively. The fires made the past year particularly challenging but our combined energy ensured that some achievements despite difficult circumstances.

In addition, I would like to thank the Management Committee which has co-ordinated and conducted much of the Society's work over the past year. I would especially like to recognise and thank those leaving the Management Committee: Lachlan Garland, for his dedicated service and leadership in the Presidential role, Don Morrison Second Vice President for fourteen years of dedicated service, Judy Smith Threatened Species Officer for her expertise and contribution to events such as Threatened Species Day, Jeanette Robinson for being a fabulous Administration Officer, Di Shanks for playing a crucial role in the Katoomba Airfield campaign, Kerry Mills for her contribution at National Parks Officer and most importantly and of particular note, Christine Davies for her 24 years as Newsletter Editor. Christine's contribution has been outstanding and her ability to put together a diverse and engaging publication will be sorely missed. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of committee members who have indicated an ongoing commitment to our work. Their hard work in running our website, finances, membership, office, meetings, campaigns and activities is much appreciated.

The hard workers on the Society's sub-committees also deserve recognition. This is where the 'nuts and bolts' work gets done to protect the environment of the Blue Mountains. My thanks go to the members of the Land Use, Education, Threatened Species sub-committees who have run workshops, conducted site visits, and produced submissions amongst other things. Thanks also to the other community groups with whom we have worked on issues such as climate change and sustainability.

Activities

Of course, our Society would be much the poorer if it were not for the massive efforts of our nursery volunteers. Our nursery helps to fund our conservation efforts, while also assisting the biodiversity of the Blue Mountains by getting native plants into gardens. Many of our nursery workers have spent years toiling away once a week and their efforts are appreciated. Please see the Nursery report for more details.

The Society is also strengthened by having a team of people who help our members enjoy, study and regenerate the bush we love. Maurice Kerkham and the team of bushwalking leaders have conducted many walks this year, Helen Yoxall has co-ordinated the plant study group and Karen Hising has lead the team of hard-working bushcarers at the Valley of the Waters site. Thank you for this work.

The past year has also seen the Society run a number of important events. These include Threatened Species Day, the Mick Darke Talk for the Future in conjunction with Varuna, stalls at community run days, supporting Bat Night, election forums, the Sunset Gathering and educational activities such as the development of a nature based activity pad. This work is appreciated and was well supported by members.

Sub Committees and Campaigns

The Society's work is largely undertaken through sub-committees comprising at least one member of the Management Committee and several ordinary members. Additionally, we have representatives and Project Officers working on specific issues. The progress of our main campaigns is outlined below.

Land Use Achievements

The Land Use sub-Committee continue to advocate and campaign for improved environmental and conservation outcomes in relation to strategic planning, development and land use within the Blue Mountains community.

This involved lodging over 17 submissions related to planning and development matters in the Blue Mountains such as the Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement, BMCC Draft Delivery Program 2017-2022, Operational Plan 2019-2020 and BMCC Draft Weed Management Strategic Plan.

The committee also undertook some major campaigns including the following:

- Lawson Crown Lands Masterplan process.
- Land clearing at the old "Crocodile park" site at Wentworth Falls. The Society made representations to Blue Mountains City Council, Commonwealth Environment Department, and local members about the impact on the swamps. A complaint by the Society to the

Building Professional Board resulted in a fine being levied on the private building certifier who issued the compliance certificate approving the bushland clearing on the site.

- “Zombie” development approvals. The bushland clearing at the old “Crocodile park” site has highlighted the issue of so called “zombie” developments approvals. These are development approvals which may have been issued up to thirty years ago, and remain valid despite the development never proceeding. The Land Use Committee has been campaigning to have the legislation changed to ensure developments approved must be completed within a specified period, otherwise the approval lapses.

The Land Use Committee has also been involved in the reporting and documenting several suspected illegal dumping and pollution incidents, and has been following up on enforcement action with the respective authorities.

Leave Radiata Wild

The thirty-year community-based campaign to conserve Radiata Plateau culminated in the Society led Leave Radiata Wild campaign in 2017. Post the NSW state election in March 2019, the Society met with senior national parks staff and presented a lengthy and comprehensive document outlining the significant natural and cultural values of the Plateau. The Society lobbied for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to undertake a conservation assessment of the Plateau and provide advice to the new NSW Minister for the Environment Matt Kean.

In July 2019 the Plateau’s owners Transcendental Meditation Group put the Plateau up for sale on the open market. The Leave Radiata Wild campaign entered a key stage and our efforts accelerated. These efforts included: an open letter to Minister Kean published in the Blue Mountains Gazette urging purchase, an accompanying media, social media and letter writing campaign, meetings with politicians including local state member Trish Doyle, local federal member Susan Templeman, and NSW Upper House MLC Shayne Mallard and liaison with the Plateau’s owners the Maharishi Foundation.

On 8 October 2019 Minister Kean publicly announced that the State government had purchased the Plateau for inclusion in the national park system. The community’s thirty year effort had finally culminated in the Plateau being protected for future generations.

Gardens of Stone

The long-running Gardens of Stone campaign continued this year with the aim being to gain protection for the spectacular forested area north of Lithgow. The Gardens of Stone Alliance (Blue Mountains Conservation Society, Colong Foundation and Lithgow Environment Group) launched a new initiative to promote the area as a low impact tourism destination. The Alliance commissioned Destination Pagoda, a visitor management plan showing how this area could become a popular tourist attraction and benefit the local Lithgow economy. Destination Pagoda, together with a newly commissioned documentary, Living Landscape: Gardens of Stone, was launched in Lithgow,

Katoomba and Sydney in March and April. Lithgow Council councillors were also briefed. Centennial Coal, the owners of nearly all the mines in the Gardens of Stone, openly supported the creation of the state conservation area for the first time.

Also in the Gardens of Stone area, the Springvale mine water treatment plant neared completion. This plant will treat mine wastewater from Springvale mine and reuse it at Mt Piper Power station thus preventing pollution in the Cocks River and Sydney's drinking water supply. This was a great win for environmental groups' campaigns over the years to reduce coal mining's impact on the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

Protecting the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

The past year saw the Society continue its work to stop Clarence Coal mine's polluting the near pristine Wollangambe River, which flows through the World Heritage area. Other efforts related to the protection of the GBMWhA included:

- a submission to the independent audit of Sydney's drinking water catchment
- keeping members abreast with the issues and recovery efforts during the massive 2019-20 bushfires through our website and members email
- actively involved in the Colong Foundation's Give a Dam campaign
- Federal and State Election questionnaires and forums

Katoomba Airfield

The Society has been working to have Katoomba airfield, an inholding within the National Park, incorporated into the National Park to be used for emergency services only. Despite a significant amount of community, local government support and even past State Government reports supporting incorporation over a long period, an interim license was issued to a private commercial operator in February 2018 without community consultation on options for the future of the airfield. The Society worked with residents and community groups, especially the Katoomba Airfield Community Group, to ensure that any proposed use of the airfield did not compromise the conservation values of the Blue Mountains National Park. There was overwhelming community opposition to a proposal for helicopter charter flights due to concerns around noise pollution, preserving the appeal of the Blue Mountains as a peaceful environment, potential pollution of water supplies, and protecting Aboriginal heritage interests. Happily, due to the combined community efforts, the interim lease ceased and helicopter flights were prohibited. The Society will now work on the main object of the campaign being the incorporation of the airfield into the National park.

In conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and support the Society. I look forward to working with you in the future as we strive to protect the natural wonders that surround us.

Tara Cameron