



## **Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc Annual General Meeting 2021**

### **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. We have actually seen an increase in our membership over the past year which is very pleasing and quite an achievement in current circumstances. Obviously, COVID has made the year particularly challenging and we recognised this by giving all members a 3-month extension on their memberships before payments were due.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the Management Committee which has co-ordinated and conducted much of the Society's work over the past year adapting to meetings via 'zoom' and working in a very positive and energising way. I would especially like to recognise those leaving the Management Committee: Maurice Kerkham, the Bushwalking Convenor from April 2010 to March 2021 for his tireless work co-ordinating a substantial bushwalking program, organising insurance and other administration as well as adapting to COVID restrictions, and Valda Low who has filled several roles including Website Officer (August 2015 to March 2018), Environment Education Officer (April 2018 to March 2019) and most recently Social Media Officer (April 2020 to March 2021). Valda will continue some of the social media work which is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank those re-nominating: Madi Maclean Senior Vice President and Gardens of Stone Project Officer, Susan Crick Second Vice President and Hut News Editor, Elizabeth Howard Treasurer, Caroline Druce Administration Officer, Heather Hull Meetings Secretary, Rebecca Knight Publicity Officer, Ross Coster Membership Secretary, Alan Page Website Manager, Paul Irwin Nursery Manager, Angela Langdon Landuse Officer, Clare Power Sustainability Officer, Adam Curry National Parks Officer, Cathy Cavanagh Environmental Education Officer, Paul Vale Bushcare Officer and Hugh Paterson Bushfire Representative. Sadly, I would like to take this time to reflect on some of the people we have lost in the past year: Lachlan Garland past President, Landuse, Membership Secretary and Bushcare Officer, Richard Lowson and Wes Marley.

A positive development this year was the running of a Planning Day facilitated by Pip Walsh which helped the Management Committee and some subcommittee members examine the feedback in the Member's survey and begin planning in a more pro-active way. One of the outcomes was an increase in co-ordination between publicity, the newsletter, website and membership resulting in some membership initiatives via social media and events. Additionally, new subcommittees have been formed - being Protected Areas and Climate Change.

## Activities

Of course, our Society would be much the poorer if it were not for the massive efforts of our nursery volunteers. The nursery has gone from strength to strength in 2021 and 2020, adapting to COVID regimes. Online sales increased and whole different ways of operating were enacted. Please see the Nursery report for more details.

The bushwalkers and plant study group also coped with the restrictions and continued to run excellent programs allowing people to get into the bush we love. Maurice Kerkham and the team of bushwalking leaders have many walks this year adding a new Tuesday group. Helen Yoxall has co-ordinated the plant study group which had 9 outings in the 12 months including a bus trip to Kanangra Walls and Paul Vale has worked as the Society contact for the Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group.

COVID restrictions limited the number of events run by the Society in the past year but I would like to acknowledge Judy and Peter Smith for their excellent talk held by zoom on the threatened fauna of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. This was held on the 20th anniversary of the listing and complemented by a special colour anniversary edition of Hut News. In February we were pleased to run a 'face to face' Sunset Gathering at the Conservation Hut, as well as hosting 'The Weather Diaries' at Mount Vic Flicks in March and co-hosting the Mick Dark Talk for the Future on 15 April.

## 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 Society's Land Use subcommittee consists of a small but dedicated group of volunteers who seek to protect the beautiful Blue Mountains environment by influencing land use planning, development approvals and reporting potential breaches of environmental legislation such as unapproved land clearing and water pollution events.

In the last 12 months, the Society Land Use subcommittee has continued to strongly advocate for the natural environment despite the limitations Covid 19 placed on the work of the sub-Committee. The sub Committee continued to meet throughout last year, when possible, and members continued to liaise through email and phone.

Land Use members were saddened by the passing of a dedicated long time member of the subcommittee Lachlan Garland in 2020. Lachlan's humour, his passion and his persistence will be missed deeply by all members of the subcommittee.

In the last 12 months the subcommittee has:

- Prepared 16 submissions (see the Society webpage)

- Attended 8 meetings or consultations with other government agencies or Blue Mountains City Council
- Promoted the work of the subcommittee through Hut News, Society email blasts, the Society Facebook page and through media releases to the Blue Mountains Gazette

Issues which the Land Use subcommittee has campaigned on in the last 12 months include:

- Proposed zoo and hotel development (aka the Croc Park site) at Wentworth Falls
- “Zombie” development approvals – a loophole in the planning system where a development, which may have been approved up to thirty years ago but then not proceeded, will continue to have the approval remaining in place in perpetuity. The Society is aware of three such zombie approvals – the old Croc Park at Wentworth Falls, the hotel development near the Katoomba Golf Course, and the mixed development site near the railway overpass at Katoomba.
- Lawson Crown Land Draft Plan of Management and Draft Masterplan
- Development controls in terms of Senior Housing
- Katoomba Masterplan process
- Great Western Highway Upgrade: Medlow Bath to Blackheath. The Society does not support the proposed highway upgrade for Blackheath/Medlow Bath for a range of environmental reasons. This includes the two tunnel options currently being proposed for Blackheath, which have the potential to negatively impact on groundwater aquifers, and consequently on swamps and watercourses.
- Reclassification of the former clubhouse, Katoomba Golf Course
- Wentworth Falls Lake Draft Masterplan
- Possible illegal clearing of bushland Shirlow Ave, Faulconbridge,
- Faulconbridge Quarry – reporting possible water pollution events and raising concerns in regard to unapproved expansion of existing use rights
- Proposed upgrade of the lookout at Gordon Falls

### **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) built on the ‘Destination Pagoda’ initiative launched in 2019 and garnered support for the proposal by getting people out for a ‘Day in the Gardens’ event with COVID restrictions in October 2020. The Gardens of Stone campaign continued to push for protection particularly for the upland swamps impacted by fires and underground coal mining.

### **Climate Change, Education and Tourism/Visitation**

Actions to address climate change and promote sustainability continued including the publication of a fantastic brochure outlining changes you can make and ways to ‘raise your voice on climate change’. The Society also worked with other groups such as the Macquarie Electorate students and supported School Strike events. Submissions were also written to oppose developments such as the Bylong mine and the Narrabri Gas proposal.

Environmental education initiatives also remained a focus in the past year. The direct work in schools was curtailed due to COVID restrictions but other work has continued. This included an examination of the impacts of increasing visitation and tourism in the Blue Mountains. Research was conducted on ways to

reduce impacts and think more sustainably and creatively about this area. This will continue to guide work and conversations with local organisations such as the Council.

### **Katoomba Airfield**

The Society has been working to have Katoomba Airfield, an inholding within the National Park, incorporated into the National Park for over 20 years. 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 oppose 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. Unfortunately, while this proposal was initially rejected in January 2020, it is now back on the table with the Government reviewing the decision. This has led to an increase in Society campaigning in conjunction with Katoomba Airfield Action Group. The Society will now work on the main object of the campaign being the incorporation of the airfield into the national park. This will be an ongoing priority in the coming year.

### **Warragamba Dam and Protected Areas**

Opposing the raising of the dam wall has been an ongoing priority. In the past year, we continued our opposition and supported the work of the Colong Foundation in this area. The Society also supports Aboriginal organisations such as the Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association and elders committed to opposing the dam wall raising.

### **Submissions and Society Newsletters**

Our fantastic website hosts a large amount of valuable information and work completed by Society members in the past year. Of particular note on the Letters and Submission page are submissions on the:

- EPBC Act Review
- NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry
- Gordon Falls Project - The Grand Cliff Top Walk and Gordon Falls Lookout accessibility upgrade
- Bowdens Silver Project, Lue NSW

The website also contains a fabulous archive of our newsletters. An additional 250 Society newsletters were scanned and added to the website this year including those from the Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society beginning in 1966. I would like to thank both Alan Page for his work in this area and also Phoebe Coster for typing up old newsletters with 25 being now appended to the original scanned newsletter.

### **In conclusion**

Thank you for your role in supporting the Society. I look forward to working with you all to conserve and protect the beautiful Blue Mountains which we all love.

Tara Cameron