

FOKE



FRIENDS OF
KU-RING-GAI
ENVIRONMENT INC.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

28 MAY 2014

We are committed to a number of things – returning planning powers to local communities, putting a curb on Ministerial powers, putting caps on donations and campaign spending to end the ‘decisions for donations’ culture in this state and for pursuing planning policies that go beyond a one size fits all medium density strategy .– Barry O’Farrell, 27 May, 2009

These were the words of the then Leader of the Opposition Barry O’Farrell speaking in front of 1000 Ku-ring-gai residents, at the UTS Campus, as they voiced their opposition to the Planning Panel ’s decision to approve the Ku-ring-gai Town Centre LEP which proposed massive overdevelopment of Ku-ring-gai’s local shopping centres.

Most had hoped that a change of government would bring in a new era of transparency and accountability for NSW. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Many of the pre-election promises have not been honoured. Planning powers have not been returned to local communities. The scourge of political donations as revealed through the ICAC investigation, have not been properly curbed. The community, quite rightly, feels disillusioned and betrayed.

It is hoped that with the new Premier and Cabinet, the NSW government will address its failings of the past three years and restore confidence in the NSW planning system. FOKE will continue to highlight these concerns and keep the government accountable to its election promises.

A NEW PLANNING SYSTEM FOR NSW – PLANNING BILLS IN LIMBO

As reported in the President’s Report in 2013, the NSW Government released its Green Paper - *A New Planning System for NSW*, which set out to reform the NSW planning system. Most submissions lodged were highly critical of the Green Paper. In August 2012 FOKE joined *Better Planning Network* [BPN], now an affiliation of over 470 NSW community groups who highlighted concerns about the Green Paper and its directions. Instead of incorporating the Moore/Dyer Report’s 370 recommendations – based on widespread community consultation - the new planning legislation was drafted to satisfy the property industry.

Then the Government released its White Paper and draft Planning Bills in May 2013. The Planning Minister received over 6000 public submissions. Most opposed the draft Planning Bills, including the Law Society and the Independent Commission Against Corruption which highlighted corruption risks in the draft.

BPN is to be congratulated for its successful community campaign to amend and defeat the Bills. In the Upper House, Labor, the Greens and the Shooters & Fishers Party made significant amendments based on public submissions. On 28 November 2013 Minister Hazzard withdrew the Bills. In May 2014, Planning Minister Hazzard stood down from the portfolio.

As part of BPN action to defeat the Planning Bills, FOKE participated in a number of rallies held across Sydney, including outside Brad Hazzard and Barry O'Farrell offices. Street stalls were held across Ku-ring-gai to inform residents about the proposed planning legislation. Approximately 3000 letters, signed by Ku-ring-gai residents, were delivered to Ku-ring-gai and Davidson MPs as well as other key MLCs. The results of the BPN survey were printed in our December 2013 Newsletter and sent to Ku-ring-gai and Davidson MPs and members of the NSW Cabinet.

FOKE representatives also attended industry, university and community forums on the planning legislation.

The Planning Bills have been withdrawn since January 2014. Now, with the recent appointments of Planning Minister Pru Goward MP and Assistant Planning Minister Rob Stokes MP, we await to see whether the state government will continue with its flawed planning legislation.

FOKE will continue to work with BPN to get a fair, transparent and accountable planning system for NSW.

ICAC COMMISSION HEARINGS

For years FOKE has been concerned about the influence of developer donations in influencing government decision making, particularly in the area of planning and development. The ICAC Commission hearings have exposed the corruption of NSW government processes and the influence of political donations and lobbyists on both sides of government. FOKE has highlighted these concerns for over a decade.

HABITAT STEPPING STONES PROJECT

FOKE Committee member, Janet Harwood is FOKE's representative on Ku-ring-gai Council's *Habitat Stepping Stones Project*, a partnership between Ku-ring-gai Council and the Australian Research Institute for Environment at Macquarie University. This project assists property owners in adding habitat features to their gardens that create '*habitat stepping stones*' between wildlife corridors. Janet is also a member of the Ku-ring-gai Council *Wild Things* Committee.

FOKE GRANT SUCCESS

FOKE applied for an Environmental Levy Small Grants Program Grant in September 2013 and was successful in receiving \$1300 from Ku-ring-gai Council for two signs that raise awareness of Sheldon Forest Endangered Blue Gum High Forest at Turrumurra. The signs for this unique and threatened forest will soon be erected. We are most grateful for the kind assistance of John Martyn of STEP in designing these signs.

FOKE NEWSLETTERS

This year, as in previous years, FOKE's newsletters and emails have provided updates on FOKE's activities. FOKE's newsletters continue to be sent to NSW State Library where they are archived as part of the documentary history of NSW. With their emphasis on planning issues, our newsletters are also sent to politicians, academics, professionals, institutions and other relevant organisations. Our newsletters are archived on www.foke.org.au. With community groups now relying more and more on electronic communication rather than printed and posted communications, we plan to increase the number of Enews to members and friends. We thank Deborah Mobberley for editing and preparing our newsletters.

FOKE WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

FOKE continues to be grateful for webmaster Graham Lewis' work to maintain FOKE's website. Under Graham's expertise FOKE's website provides resources for members, media and the community. Committee member Ursula Bonzol has kindly agreed to assist with the website's maintenance.

During the year Ursula set up FOKE's Facebook page – [Friendsofkuringgai](#) – which will enable FOKE to communicate its messages to a wider audience. We encourage members to log on and 'like' our Facebook page and post comments.

FOKE's SUBMISSIONS TO GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PLANS

FOKE made a number of written submissions to Ku-ring-gai Council and the NSW Government in response to public policy exhibitions and development applications. FOKE Committee members have addressed Ku-ring-gai Council meetings, including the Culworth Avenue Car Park Planning Proposal and Reclassification Public Hearing; the Planning Proposal and Reclassification of 9 Havilah Lane Lindfield; 2014 Heritage Conservation Areas (HCA) Review - North - Draft Heritage Reports; and Draft Land Divestment and Acquisition Strategy.

Submissions were made to the State Government on the Draft NSW Metrostrategy 2031; Independent Local Government Review; NSW White Paper and the Planning Bills; and reductions in rail services to the North Shore Line.

FOKE's ENVIRONMENTAL SUB-COMMITTEE

FOKE continues to highlight the plight of Ku-ring-gai's urban forests and the cumulative impact of zonings on environmentally sensitive areas. Issues of biodiversity loss, critical habitat and cumulative impacts must be addressed in any new NSW planning legislation.

The sub-committee has prepared a proposal to Ku-ring-gai Council for a *Turrumurra Heritage Precinct Walk* - a project that would provide socio-economic value to Ku-ring-gai whilst highlighting the heritage and environment that surrounds Turrumurra Shopping Centre.

FOKE IN THE COMMUNITY

- FOKE liaises closely with other community groups on state, planning and environmental issues. We are most grateful for STEP's and BPN's assistance in holding street stalls in Wahroonga, Turrumurra, North Turrumurra, West Pymble, Lindfield and Roseville. STEP helped with a random electorate survey of residents' attitudes towards the effectiveness of Ku-ring-gai MPs in dealing with local planning issues.

The Survey results were consistent across various local government areas. 97% said planning laws should be driven by principles that protect our quality of life, environment and heritage; 71% said high-rise is impacting on their area; 97% wanted the right to comment on development proposals next door or nearby; only 4% agreed that high-rise apartment should replace family homes in low density suburbs; only 9% agreed that their State MPs had been effective in addressing these issues; only 22% said that if there was an election tomorrow, they would vote for their current sitting MP; and significantly 89% said these issues will influence their vote.

- FOKE continues to respond to requests from residents, students and community groups on planning, development, heritage, environment issues as well as how to respond to specific development applications.
- FOKE continues to sponsor the Jan Langley Prize at East Lindfield Public School for Environment and Sustainability Excellence. The 2013 Award was presented to Year Six student Kathryn Fung. FOKE members will recall Jan Langley, a long time FOKE Committee member, who was very active in the community and in protecting Ku-ring-gai's heritage and had a close association with Lindfield East Public School.

- FOKE had the opportunity to nominate two distinguished Ku-ring-gai wartime heroes for the naming of the UTS Oval and Community Centre in Lindfield. Council accepted FOKE's nomination of Charles E. W. Bean War Historian and Correspondent, for the naming of the UTS Sportsfield, and Blair Wark DSO VC for the Community Centre. We understand the naming ceremony will take place later in 2014. Charles Bean's granddaughter is FOKE's past president and member Anne Carroll.
- FOKE Committee members participated in Ku-ring-gai Council's Community Development Workshops – *Media and Public Relation Skills; Effective Advocacy and Lobbying Government and Governance and the Law.*
- FOKE continues to keep abreast of Ku-ring-gai Council's decisions, and is fortunate in having members of its Committee attend Council meetings in order to report on important issues.
- FOKE participated in a forum highlighting the threats to Sydney's water supply by long wall coal mining under Sydney's water catchment in partnership with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, STEP, the National Parks Association of NSW and Our Land Our Water, Our Future on 10 May, 2014.

FOKE COMMITTEE

This is my first President's report since Anne Carroll retired as President in 2013. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Anne for helping me in my transition and in assisting with correspondence and documents she retained during her 18 years as President of FOKE.

I also extend my thanks to FOKE members for their support, and encouragement and generous donations to enable us to carry out our work.

I also extend my appreciation to the dedicated and hardworking FOKE Committee for their support and assistance over the past year – Ursula Bonzol, Carolyn Darby, Janet Harwood, Janine Kitson, Deborah Mobberley, Katrina Pickles, Jean Posen, Dinah Warner and Tanya Wood. Past committee member Jill Johnstone has continued to assist us with membership administration.

Sadly, we are farewelling outgoing committee member, Jean Posen. Jean has worked passionately and tirelessly for FOKE for 18 years in collecting information, articles and writing submissions on behalf of FOKE. Jean's various scrap books record some of Ku-ring-gai's most controversial planning and political stories of the past 18 years. During her time on the Committee Jean attended several planning department seminars, addressed numerous Council meetings, and wrote many submissions. Jean was instrumental in FOKE applying for the *Keep Australia Beautiful NSW Metro Pride Award* which was awarded in 2000. We wish Jean and Sol a happy and fulfilling retirement from FOKE life and activities.

In conclusion, 2013-2014 has been an extraordinarily busy and challenging year for FOKE. This year appears no different with plans to review our constitution, increase our membership and update our membership form.

As it has done for the past 19 years, FOKE will continue its work – to protect and enhance Ku-ring-gai.

We look forward to welcoming you to our 20th AGM and Public Meeting next year.

Kathy Cowley
President