

FOKE



FRIENDS OF
KU-RING-GAI
ENVIRONMENT INC.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 25 MAY 2016

'We found no statistically significant differences between merged and unmerged councils on all indicators. There is thus no empirical support for the panel's claim that amalgamation will improve council performance.'

*'The NSW public have every right to be dismayed by the waste of public resources on the inept panel and the prospect of a further futile waste of millions of dollars if the proposed mergers proceed.'.....
'No evidence that local government amalgamations will improve performance.'* SMH 4 May 2015

Quoting Professor Brian Dollery and Dr Joseph Drew, Centre for Local Government, University of New England, Armidale

Despite overwhelming opposition from Ku-ring-gai councillors and residents, on 18 December 2015, Premier Baird stated his resolution to force councils to amalgamate, breaking the Liberal Party promise by and since Barry O'Farrell NOT to do so. The Baird Government, knowing that they could not gain the support of the Upper House for achieving forced amalgamations, resorted to reducing the number of councils and, therefore, resident representation to advance a development agenda by changing the electoral boundaries across the State.

The long-awaited KPMG report, which the Government insists reveals detailed cost-benefit analysis but has refused to reveal it in the public domain, has now been quarantined as 'Commercial in Confidence'! So, to date, there is no data to support claims that these amalgamations will save money and add to infrastructure as Premier Baird claims. In an attempt to rush these changes through, this Liberal Government has not presented any reliable facts, only misleading and expensive advertising campaigns.

There have been rallies against forced amalgamations throughout NSW, which leaves no doubt that the public and most councils are against this action by the heavy-handed Baird Government. However, it is now forcing its merger agenda on the citizens of NSW and, as of 12 May, 43 Sydney metropolitan councils have disappeared into 19 super councils. The fate of another 23 councils is being delayed while 9 undertake legal action against the mergers. Across the state the Premier is hoping to reduce the total number of councils from 152 to 115.

One of these is Ku-ring-gai Council, which has repeatedly shown AND proven that it can stand alone and is now approaching a highly critical time in its 110-year history to continue that way. Ku-ring-gai's important and valued cultural history could be relegated to the history books with a 'stroke of a Minister's pen'.

Ratepayers have been lied to repeatedly and misled by the State Government in media statements and

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2009 NATIONAL TRUST HERITAGE AWARDS HIGHLY COMMENDED
2008 NSW GOVERNMENT HERITAGE VOLUNTEERS AWARD
2000 WINNER NSW HERITAGE OFFICE AWARD
"HERITAGE WATCH OVER OUR PLACE OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE -KU-RING-GAI"
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paid advertisements that claim local government is ‘broken’, that local government will be more sustainable and that there will be significant savings and better outcomes for families with merged councils. I believe this state-wide political gerrymander is bent on controlling the agenda of every council to reduce what little say residents have left in local government and to facilitate development.

There is no logic in the proposed merger as Ku-ring-gai Council already services one of the larger populated metropolitan areas in Sydney. The Merger Proposal presented by the NSW Government does not highlight any improvements for the residents of Ku-ring-gai. However, the risks to Ku-ring-gai of higher rates, reduced services, reduced representation, increased unsympathetic development and the loss of protections for our heritage and environment are enormous.

The merging of Ku-ring-gai with Hornsby Shire would result in one of the largest councils in NSW—larger in size than the Government’s own recommendations—with an estimated population of 320,000 residents by 2031. In essence the entire amalgamation consultation process is a pre-determined farce perpetrated by a government obsessed with fast-tracking development at all costs.

Community consultation has been undemocratic with submissions made to government-appointed delegates whose recommendations were bound to be in line with the Government’s agenda. Already the Government has appointed several delegates as administrators of those councils amalgamated against their will on 12 May.

Throughout the examination process (called ‘Fit for the Future’), Ku-ring-gai Council was found to be well managed, in a healthy financial position and providing quality services and facilities to its residents. The only criteria that this Liberal Government can use to force an amalgamation on Ku-ring-gai is ‘scale and capacity’ or population size. Even on this criteria, the Government’s own projection of savings is an exceedingly low 1.5% and when calculated over a period of 20 years this is susceptible to significant margins of error.

The amalgamation savings rely on council job cuts, reducing and reclassifying permanent positions, casualisation of the workforce, subcontracting services out to private providers, reducing councillor representation, and privatisation of assets and services.

Professor Dollery, an acknowledged expert on Council amalgamations, confirms that the figures and reasons given by the Baird Government don’t add up and has stated: *‘The big end of town wants fewer local councils because it is easier to get development applications approved’*.

Who will benefit from this forced amalgamation? Few doubt it will be the community. However, there is plenty of evidence that amalgamations will benefit the property industry, which will push for higher densities, overdevelopment and opportunistic profits at the cost of the environment, heritage and local identity.

We thank all the members who attended the Public Inquiry on 3 February and sent submissions to the Delegate. It was very gratifying to see over 700 people attend the Public Inquiry and 100 people present verbal submissions—all opposed, with the exception of two submissions, to forced amalgamation. Now, we need to hold our politicians responsible for their undemocratic actions.

We congratulate Ku-ring-gai Council on its success in winning access to the Delegate’s Report in the Supreme Court on 8 April and wish for every success on the legal action in the Land and Environment Court.

● FOKE's ACTIONS - COUNCIL AMALGAMATIONS

As mentioned in the 2015 President's Report, FOKE has spoken out strongly against council amalgamations being pressed by the State Government and has made verbal submissions to the Sampson Enquiry and written submissions to Council, IPART, the Delegate Council Boundary Review and, Minister for Local Government and Ku-ring-gai's Members of Parliament. One of FOKE's press releases was the basis of the article in the April 2015 *Sydney Observer* - Community in the Dark for Amalgamation'.

We supported the Council decision to stand alone and were dismayed that the State Government would not respect Council's strong position to stand alone. FOKE also hoped our elected parliamentarians would support Ku-ring-gai Council's position against amalgamation, however they have held form to their party line to support forced amalgamations.

On 26 February 2016, approximately 150 Ku-ring-gai residents rallied at the Lindfield office of the Federal MP for Bradfield, Paul Fletcher, whose official Ministerial title includes 'Local Government'. This alliance of 12 Ku-ring-gai community groups, including members of FOKE, delivered a letter asking him to stand with the Ku-ring-gai community and intervene immediately to halt the process of forced amalgamation of Ku-ring-gai with Hornsby Shire.

The letter stated: '*...the Liberal Government when elected in 2011 promised the people of NSW that there would be no forced council amalgamations and that community's views would be listened to and respected*'. Its purpose was to convince Mr Fletcher that communities believe that the amalgamation process now being imposed on them has broken that promise.

The alliance is concerned that Mr Fletcher has not taken a stand on the Baird Government's actions on this issue despite the overwhelming opposition expressed by his constituents and local government in the public hearings, submissions and in the media. Mr Fletcher's letter in reply six weeks later stated: '*Naturally I am closely watching the current reform process in NSW directed at reducing the number of councils and increasing their size to promote long term sustainability. However, it is the responsibility of the NSW Government to manage this process and respond to the issues raised by councils and residents*'. Clearly Mr Fletcher is not wishing to support the majority of his Ku-ring-gai constituents who have stated that they want Ku-ring-gai Council to stand alone. His portfolio also includes Major Projects, including infrastructure in NSW!

With a Federal election to be held on 2 July, again we ask our representatives, who are they representing? Are they indifferent to the views of their constituents when there is vast opposition to an issue? Where is the support that they always asked of us?

● SAVE KU-RING-GAI AND SAVE OUR COUNCILS COALITION (SOCC)

We have been working closely with the Save Our Council's Coalition (SOCC) to fight forced amalgamation and have attended rallies and meetings with groups from all over NSW who are opposed to being merged, with the eventual target appearing to be to form 27 mega councils.

We thank our members who attended the SOCC Rally in Martin Place on 18 November and the 'Local Democracy—Not Dictatorship' Rally in Hyde Park on 13 March to listen to speakers from council areas across NSW who were fighting forced amalgamations. Without the publicity and interest that Alan Jones AO has given to amalgamations on his radio show much of NSW would be in the dark about what has been a very divisive and manipulative process by the Baird Government.

At a local level, FOKE helped form an alliance called 'Save Ku-ring-gai' with 13 other Ku-ring-gai community groups opposed to amalgamation and our volunteers delivered 30,000 flyers to letter boxes throughout Ku-ring-gai in order to inform residents about the Government's process.

● THE BETTER PLANNING NETWORK NSW (BPN)

FOKE has a new representative, Janet Harwood, elected to the executive committee of Better Planning Network (BPN)—an affiliation of over 470 community groups across NSW. A number of disturbing planning changes are proposed for NSW by the State Government which FOKE will be keenly following, namely:

A. Planning Legislation changes

FOKE will continue to work with the BPN, as it has for the past three years, to get a fairer, transparent and accountable planning system in NSW, particularly as the Minister for Planning, Rob Stokes, announced this month that there will be a 'White Paper Mark 11'. That announcement came in the same week as the NSW Government announced a new Biodiversity Act that will reintroduce land clearing across NSW. Minister Stokes declared that the Government will change the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (the EP&A Act) to:

- create a simpler and faster assessment process;
- increase community confidence;
- create an orderly and balance architecture for decision making.

In a briefing attended by the BPN, the Planning Minister Stokes announced that a series of stakeholder advisory round tables will start in Sydney and Parramatta this month, with a Draft Exposure Bill to be made available for public comment as soon as possible. Whilst the BPN was pleased to see a commitment to retaining the definition of Ecologically Sustainable Development, the Minister's comments that *'everyone was delighted with the Green Paper'* but *'less so with the White Paper'* prompted concern because many of the White Paper 'reforms' have been introduced through a process of stealth since 2013 and the Minister said the central themes in the now stalled 2013 'reforms' will be the starting point for the new Bill, namely:

- consolidating community consultation
- specifying different development pathways
- streamlining the environment assessment provisions
- incorporating state significant infrastructure into the Part 5
- standardising provisions relating to administration of the act
- improving structure and language in the act

Further changes that will be explored include:

- embedding best practice 'community participation'
- ensuring LEPs remain 'relevant and effective'
- accountability when carrying out environmental assessments for non- government providers
- streamlining the assessment process for local development
- integrating development consent conditions and other licences into the legislation
- introducing a mechanism to ensure the costs of key growth infrastructure are funded and delivered to promote 'sustainable growth'
- reduce duplication, e.g., a two-stage process such as the Planning Assessment Commission
- elevate the role of design
- increasing outcomes based reporting for councils

Elton Consulting have been retained to undertake the round table process starting in Sydney and Parramatta this month. This prompted concerns about the shortness in notice and work load thrust on volunteer organisations, such as BPN that has limited resources.

In addition, the department will continue to rationalise the number and scope of State Environmental Planning Policies. A review of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 will be undertaken in early 2017, with views sought on a Regulatory Impact Statement and Draft Regulation later this year.

Whilst the amalgamation issue and process has taken up much of FOKE's attention this year, we still intend to invite Minister Stokes on a tour of Ku-ring-gai to demonstrate and highlight Ku-ring-gai's dilemma about providing additional new housing, particularly along the environmentally sensitive North Shore railway/Pacific Highway/ Mona Vale corridor and in key suburbs, without further compromising Ku-ring-gai's natural and built heritage.

B. Greater Sydney Commission

Earlier this year, Planning Minister Stokes introduced the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC), headed by Chief Commissioner Lucy Turnbull. The Prime Minister's wife will not only chair the GSC but will be able to sit in on NSW Cabinet discussions. The GSC will have very significant powers. The principal objectives of the Commission are to:

- lead metropolitan planning for the Greater Sydney Region
- promote the principles of ecologically sustainable development, taking into account social, economic and environmental considerations
- promote the integration of Government decision-making on infrastructure and land use planning
- promote the supply of housing, including affordable housing
- encourage development that is resilient, addressing the risks posed by climate change and taking into account natural hazards
- support ongoing improvement in productivity, liveability and environmental quality
- provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment in the Greater Sydney Region.

The Government has prepared a 'Statement of Priorities' for the Commission in its inaugural period from January 2016 to October 2018. The priorities outlined are based on the Commission's statutory responsibilities under the Greater Sydney Commission Act 2015 (GSC Act). This will mean that local communities will lose control of their planning to the appointed members of the GSC and the State Government's big growth agenda. Whilst communities may be consulted over planning the input will be meaningless if it does not fit the agenda of the GSC.

C. Exempt and Complying Code

FOKE understands that the State Government is intending to amend the Exempt and Complying Code to allow medium density development in R2 or single residential zones across Ku-ring-gai. This will allow densification, resulting in drastic change to the landscape and character of our suburbs. We must not let this happen!

The NSW Government is currently proposing a new route for the delivery of medium density development – called complying medium density. Currently, the R3 zone has been designed to deliver medium density. This proposal to change medium density to complying development would effectively wipe out zoning for this type of housing because it would be allowed anywhere. The proposed planning instrument covers all residential (single dwelling) R2 land in NSW with a street frontage of 12.5m or more and a minimum lot size of 400sqm.

The medium density housing could be:

- two dwellings (dual occupancies) on a single lot of 400sqm

- three to four dwellings (manor homes) on a single lot of 500sqm (manor homes—a single building which contains four dwellings, two on the ground floor, two on the first floor)
- three to ten dwellings on a single lot of 600sqm (townhouses/terraces/combinations of development types)

While there is definitely a need for a variety of housing types, this proposal applies an effective blanket rezoning to medium density (with minor exceptions) to all low density residential R2 land. It does not take into account the cumulative effects of intensifying development on local infrastructure, services, traffic, street car parking, social services and amenities.

This proposal intensifies the centralisation of planning in NSW, something which started with the move to amalgamate councils. It excludes community input and overrides any Local Environmental Plans (LEPs). Under complying development, local residents are not notified and do not have the right to comment on or object to the development under the normal council merit-based assessment process. It overrides local environment plans and this is contrary to the Government's election promise of increased consultation with communities.

It is a 'one size fits all' proposal that ignores variations in local geography, history and environmental considerations—factors which help create and maintain the character of our suburbs and towns.

The proposal ignores the principles of good strategic planning by allowing development to occur anywhere, regardless of how it sits within the development already in the existing area. It will not be integrated with planned infrastructure. It also ignores the Federal Government's environmental policy that encourages the retention of vegetation in order to address climate change and improve the green areas in our cities.

Though the submission period has finished we urge you to write to your State representatives, Alister Henskens SC MP and Jonathan O'Dea MP regarding your objection to this proposed legislation while we await the outcome of the community consultation.

Overall, the extent of these planning changes and proposals will ensure that the environmental, cultural and built heritage across Sydney will be lost, including what is unique about Ku-ring-gai. These plans will benefit developers for short-term profit rather than provide a world class city that honours its diversity and its history.

• SHELDON FOREST EDUCATIONAL SIGNS

We are pleased to announce that Ku-ring-gai Council granted FOKE a further \$1,360 following our successful nomination for an Environmental Grant in 2015. The two additional signs, which were also designed for us by John Martyn of STEP Inc., will be erected in Sheldon Forest this year by Council. We thank Council for awarding the grant to FOKE.

FOKE has now conducted three Sheldon Forest Walks to highlight the need to protect and preserve this important threatened and endangered ecological community.

• BAIRDS WAR ON TREES AND NATURE

Last year I reported that on 1 August 2014 the NSW Government announced the commencement of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Legislation and Code of Practice. This allowed trees to be removed without council approval if they were within a 10 metre proximity to a home and other vegetation if within a 50 metre radius when in a designated fire threat area. There has been widespread misuse of this legislation to destroy hundreds of trees across Ku-ring-gai and thousands across Sydney. In 2015 there was a

widely ignored tightening of the legislation. FOKE and groups across Sydney believe this Code is being manipulated to further development in fire zones than ensuring fire safety.

As mentioned earlier, Premier Baird's Biodiversity Conservation Act, released earlier this month of May 2016, will fast track land-clearing approvals to appease big agribusiness and property developers.

Before the 2015 election, Premier Baird committed to 'enhancing the State's biodiversity to benefit current and future generations' but, again, he has broken his promise in favour of his pro-development agenda that weakens our nature protection laws.

The new Biodiversity Conservation legislation will replace the Native Vegetation Act and the Threatened Species Act, thereby seriously diluting the State's land clearing laws that were introduced in 2003 to stop broad scale land clearing.

The deposed scientifically based Native Vegetation Act has saved hundreds of thousands of hectares from the bulldozer and chainsaw. Expert ecologists say that these land-clearing controls have saved more than a million animal deaths over 10 years, which is especially significant as Australia has one of the highest rates of species extinction in the world.

'Biodiversity offsets' are also to become the new 'accounting' solution for environmental loss and degradation. These offset schemes will allow developers to destroy wildlife habitat in exchange for cash for dissimilar types of habitat.

Land-clearing controls are also important to ensuring Australia keeps its international promise to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Trees and vegetation are critical carbon sinks and air cleansers.

We need stronger biodiversity laws - not weaker ones. We need a new vision to protect, restore and ensure resilience for our precious biodiversity so that our future generations can enjoy a walk through the bush and, too, be delighted by its precious wildlife. FOKE will strongly oppose the detrimental changes to NSW environmental legislation.

• FOKE WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

We thank our webmaster Graham Lewis and Ursula Bonzol for the laborious and patient work they voluntarily undertake in maintaining and updating FOKE's website. Under Graham's IT coaching and guidance, Ursula Bonzol is updating the FOKE website home page on a regular basis to provide more month-to-month information as a resource for members, media and, importantly, resource material for students' projects.

We also post our electronic newsletters on the site to gain greater public awareness of FOKE's projects, interests and work with members in protecting and conserving our heritage and environment.

We hope our members are regularly viewing FOKE's ('Friendsofkuringgai') Facebook page, which is being updated on a daily basis with articles, comment and stories pertaining to FOKE's agenda and interests. If members have not already, please log on and 'like' our Facebook page and contribute and post comments from time to time.

• FOKE'S SUBMISSIONS - GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PLANS

Some of FOKE's submissions to Council have included support for the local heritage listing of 28 Cook Road Lindfield. FOKE wrote a submission and attended two Land and Environment Court conciliation hearings on the 3M Building at the congested corner of the Pacific Highway and Ryde Road, which is heritage listed, been bought by Bunnings with the intention to demolish the iconic building and

construct a warehouse-style hardware store on this highly visible, gateway to Pymble site.

We have made several submissions on a range of high density applications across Ku-ring-gai including:

1. the three-block development to nine storeys on a Minister's Major Projects site at 1-5 Avon Road extending through remnant Blue Gum High Forest to 4 and 8 Beechworth Road Pymble, which is currently being sold off the plan by the Chinese company AUSBAO for 174 units;
2. No.1 Russell Avenue, Lindfield that, although it is zoned R3 for town houses, the DA is proposing a development for four storeys and 12 units. The application is currently before the Land and Environment Court as Council has refused the application;
3. An application for 25-27 Bushlands Avenue, Gordon, which is proposing a nursing home development in a R2 residential area. FOKE also supported the heritage listing of 25 Bushlands Avenue.

FOKE also has been collecting signatures on a petition to try to stop the rezoning and reclassification of the Lindfield Library site as proposed by Council for rezoning, sale and redevelopment for seven-storey commercial business and unit development. FOKE believes this public land is too precious to sell for more unit development when our population is growing older and larger due to the increased development across Lindfield and all of Ku-ring-gai. We need a wider variety of community and sporting facilities, not less for our rapidly ageing and growing population.

FOKE has sent submissions to the State Government on the Exempt and Complying Code changes, the Strata Title changes, amalgamation, the Greater Sydney Commission Act and various other government policy proposals.

• FOKE's ENVIRONMENTAL SUB-COMMITTEE

FOKE's environmental sub-committee continues to highlight the plight of Ku-ring-gai's Blue Gum High Forest, the Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest and the cumulative impacts of zoning areas for high density development in environmentally sensitive areas. Following the presentation of FOKE's project, the '*Turrumurra Heritage Precinct Walk*', to Ku-ring-gai Council's Economic and Social Development Advisory Committee (ESDAC) and Turrumurra Rotary, FOKE presented Council with a petition signed by more than 300 residents confirming their preference for FOKE's heritage village scale project. It proposes that future development on public land in Turrumurra be kept within the scale and character of the village. FOKE is opposed to the Council's plans to overdevelop the Ray Street Car Park with multi-storey buildings.

The sub-committee organised three heritage walks, including one through the Sheldon Forest, for the 2015 National Trust Heritage Festival on three successive Sundays in May. We are pleased to announce that FOKE's National Trust Heritage 3 Walks in 2015 were listed finalist in the 'Tours' category of the 2016 National Trust Heritage Awards that were announced this month. Janine Kitson and Janet Harwood deserve our thanks and appreciation for the incredible effort and work in arranging the walks over the past two successive years. We intend to enter the 2016 Walks in next years' Heritage Awards. Our last event this year combined a lunch and talk on '*Biodiversity Matters. Ku-ring-gai Matters*' at the Pecorino Café, Gordon. We also hope to participate in the 2017 National Trust Heritage Festival with new heritage walks.

We thank Robert and Nancy Pallin for their help and contribution in making the '*Paddy Pallin Walk*' such a great success this year. (See photos on back cover.)

The sub-committee have been in discussion with other environmental groups to explore how to give greater protection to the Sheldon Forest – Blue Gum High Forest. Our aim is to encourage Ku-ring-gai Council to upgrade the Sheldon Forest Bio Banking agreement to give greater protection to its wildlife and habitat. We are currently investigating all avenues open to us on how to strengthen the protection of this valuable endangered threatened ecological community.

● FOKE's WORK IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

- FOKE continues to liaise and engage with Ku-ring-gai local community groups on various issues such as state and local planning issues including the proposed amalgamation with Hornsby Council, the Biodiversity Act amendments and the proposed Exempt and Complying Code amendments,
- FOKE continues to respond to verbal and written requests from high school students studying geography and university students studying town planning, architecture and journalism who seek information on local planning and the impacts of urban consolidation in Ku-ring-gai and forced amalgamation. This year we had an unprecedented number of requests particularly from journalism students from the University of Technology (UTS) contacting us for help with assignments.
- During 2015 FOKE was invited for a second year by Visiting Research Fellow and Senior Lecturer Tarsha Finney of the UTS School of Architecture, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, to present a lecture titled '*FOKE'S Advocacy 1994 -2015*', to the final year Master of Architecture students. Following the lecture FOKE was asked by various Master students to provide more help and assistance for their projects on Advocacy.
- The FOKE-sponsored *Jan Langley Prize* at East Lindfield Public School for environment and sustainability excellence in December 2015 was presented to Year Five student Caitlin Thomas. FOKE remains committed to giving the *Jan Langley Prize* annually to encourage children's interest in the environment and sustainability. We are grateful in having Jan's husband Philip Langley's participation in the presentation each year and also for his help each year in setting up the AGM display boards and the storing them and other equipment at his home for safe keeping.
- As you are aware from our previous report in 2015, FOKE nominated the names of two distinguished Ku-ring-gai wartime heroes for the renaming of the UTS Oval and the Community Centre in Lindfield. Council voted to accept FOKE's nomination of Charles E W Bean, War Historian and Correspondent, for what is now the 'Charles Bean Sports Field', and 'Blair Wark VC DSO' for the Community Centre. Both sites have been modernized and upgraded to be multi-purpose state-of-the-art community facilities. We are still awaiting Council's announcement and invitation for the official naming ceremonies. Charles E W Bean's granddaughter is FOKE's past president and member, Anne Carroll.
- FOKE, as in previous years, has at least one committee member present at most council meetings to report any issues that need action and follow-up. We thank in particular Carolyn Darby for her patience in sitting through most council meetings and reporting to us matters of importance and interest to FOKE.
- FOKE representatives attended property industry forums, Sydney University Architecture Henry Halloran Trust Forums, Ku-ring-gai Council briefings and workshops and community planning meetings held by the Better Planning Network and Save Our Councils Coalition.
- The Mayor and General Manager invited FOKE committee members to participate in a number of consultation sessions regarding amalgamation to seek our views and to update us about the amalgamation process.

● FOKE COMMITTEE

As President, I am very fortunate to have a team of dedicated, enthusiastic and hard-working committee members, who have contributed considerable time and energy in various ways over the past year.

I thank Dinah Warner, our patient and diligent Treasurer, for collecting, recording and banking our membership fees and keeping our accounts up to date and to also thank Katrina Pickles for recording

and keeping accurate minutes of our meetings. Both Dinah and Katrina have been a wonderful help to me in the administration of FOKE over a number of years.

I extend my sincere appreciation and thanks to the whole committee—Ursula Bonzol, Carolyn Darby, Janet Harwood, Denise Hendy Janine Kitson, Katrina Pickles, Kerrie Piper, Dinah Warner and Tanya Wood. I also want to thank Jill Johnstone who has generously continued to assist us, as she has for so many years now, in maintaining an up-to-date membership roll, email lists and the printing of labels for posting to our members and important contacts on additional lists. Without these wonderful volunteers FOKE would not be able to function so effectively on a day to day basis.

Thanks also to Wendy Bishop, the very talented Lane Cove resident who so generously draws the highly topical cartoons that we have featured in various issues of our newsletters and on our Facebook page.

Special mention and my thanks also go to Ursula Bonzol and Janine Kitson who arrange the contributors' articles, and then put together and produce the 'FOKE TALK' Newsletter.

I would also like to congratulate Janet Harwood on her recent nomination and forthcoming award for her Services to the Environment by the Lions Club of Ku-ring-gai. Janet is most deserving of this award for her tireless daily work in raising awareness of the destruction that high density policies and development have contributed to the plight of our biodiversity and threatened ecological communities in Ku-ring-gai.

I also extend my gratitude and thanks to you, the FOKE membership, who continue to give support, encouragement and generous donations each year to enable the FOKE committee to carry out work on behalf of members. Without our committed membership, FOKE could not continue as it has for the past 21 years nor into the future.

Maintaining a strong membership remains a challenge for FOKE when so many of our members are retiring, moving out of the area or, unfortunately, have passed on. We need to encourage new members to join FOKE and we need your help to achieve this. We are redesigning our membership form and will send out copies to all members with a request to help in encouraging new members to join FOKE.

With the awful reality that 110 years of Ku-ring-gai history as a municipality may be obliterated with the 'stroke of a pen' by the Baird Government is of serious concern not only to the Council, but also for all community groups within Ku-ring-gai. We need your help and assistance to lobby our parliamentarians to stop the imminent amalgamation from happening so that we retain our Ku-ring-gai identity for many more years to come.

We support the Council's strong stance and legal action (and that of other Sydney and country councils) against amalgamation and hope there will be success in stopping the Baird Government's undemocratic and the blatant gerrymander to take control of local government. We are concerned that, if amalgamation is enforced, only those councillor candidates with the backing of large donations and/or the endorsement of a major political party, like the Liberal Party, will be successful. We believe community led independents will have little chance of election to a new or future super councils.

The proposed mega-council merger, if implemented, would significantly annihilate our local voice and representation. Decisions about developments in Ku-ring-gai would be made by 'party politicians', strangers not connected in any way to the local area and who may not share the heritage and conservation values that have come to define our local area. This would have devastating impacts for our municipality and our local community.

"Anyone who still believes that compulsory council consolidation will somehow lead to financial sustainability in local government, with more efficient councils, lower costs and substantial scale economies, has not bothered to acquaint themselves with the vast empirical literature on amalgamation." Professor Brian Dollery, SMH 12 February 2013.

IN CLOSING...

In concluding, each year has had more than its fair share of political challenges but the start of 2016 has been even more demanding. We are losing what little say we have left in local government and in the determination of planning for our area and in local decision making. **Our democracy is under real threat!** Please use the upcoming elections to take a stand for democracy and vote for the party or candidates that are opposed to forced amalgamation and support the retention of our democratic rights.

Our government representatives, both Federal and State, need to understand that we value our local democratic rights, and that heavy handed tactics as we are currently experiencing only lead to voter dissatisfaction. Our first chance to issue a ‘wake-up’ call to the Liberal Party not to disregard their electorate in the upcoming Federal election on July 2.

We are very proud to celebrate FOKE’s 21 years since its establishment in December 1994. However, there is still much to do and accomplish. We thank the members for supporting the changes to our constitution last year. FOKE will continue to uphold its aims and objectives to protect and enhance Ku-ring-gai and work hard on behalf of its members to do what we can to save Ku-ring-gai from obliteration.

We look forward to welcoming you to our 22nd AGM and Public Forum next year.

Kathy Cowley
PRESIDENT
(Prepared for 25 May 2016)

Photos of National Trust Heritage Festival Walks – Paddy Pallin Walk 2016

