



FRIENDS OF
KU-RING-GAI
ENVIRONMENT INC.

December 2007

Dear FOKE Members

► **“URBAN INSANITY” – OF STATE SIGNIFICANCE.**

“ANYONE else noticed the Meritonisation of the Pacific Highway between North Sydney and Wahroonga? Home after home has been bulldozed, replaced by block after block of units each one ungoring more and more cars onto the main North Shore artery. Is this sane urban planning?”

Peter FitzSimons, Columnist Sun-Herald (SH 22.7.07) Sydney Morning Herald, TV presenter, broadcaster, author.

This observation indicates that the planning processes in this State are deservedly attracting considerable and growing criticism. What is happening along the Pacific Highway in Ku-ring-gai shows that it is long overdue for ignorance to be replaced with knowledge; for misinformation to be replaced with facts; for a culture favouring developers to be changed for a culture favouring the community; for “goal posts” to stop shifting; for undemocratic processes to cease; for developers’ excessive greed to be curtailed; for new developments to respect environmentally important landscapes and for heritage to be protected.

► **KU-RING-GAI - A PLANNING TRAGEDY OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE.**

In April 2007, The National Trust of Australia (NSW) nominated “*Ku-ring-gai’s Urban Conservation Areas within the Context of the Original Blue Gum High Forest*” for consideration for Australia’s Top Ten Heritage At Risk Places. The Top Ten Nomination records that urban consolidation is being concentrated on the original geographic ridgeline (the Pacific Highway- Metro Road One) where the Blue Gum High Forest area, a critically endangered ecological community, and the National Trust’s Urban Conservation Areas, to a large extent overlap.

Urban consolidation is being approved before consideration by the State Government of statutory listing of Ku-ring-gai’s Urban Conservation Areas. The Nomination records the “Degree of Risk” as “Immediate, with no solution agreed” and “The Threat” as “Destruction”. Both carry the highest possible rating.

The National Trust of Australia’s (NSW) Top Ten Nomination provides the following “desired outcome/vision”:

“Development within the area (particularly urban consolidation) should proceed on an orderly basis balancing the needs of more accommodation with the conservation and protection of the area’s scenic, landscape, social and architectural significance. All bushland remnants of the Blue Gum High Forest should be transferred to the care and management of the National Parks Service as Nature Reserves or private owners should enter into conservation agreements with the National Parks Service. Development should have particular regard to the appropriate design which protects individual trees or tree stands of the Blue Gum High Forest community.”

► **PRESERVING A LEGACY - THE FUTURE**

“UNDER THE CANOPY”, Ku-ring-gai Council’s Centenary history (2006) concludes with an “Afterword” entitled “Preserving a legacy- the future” in which the final paragraph is this quotation from Council’s housing strategy (Travis McEwen Report 2000):

“Past Ku-ring-gai generations have left a legacy to Sydney of a unique blend of tall forest splendour, large areas of natural habitat (that accommodate a wide range of threatened species) and an extensive architectural

heritage. It is incumbent on this generation to preserve and where possible improve upon this legacy for the future.”

The “UNDER THE CANOPY” historians conclude that “*Ku-ring-gai Council, the State Government and the local community will need to work together creatively to ensure this happens.*” Tragically and despite the best efforts of many concerned people there is little evidence of that creative co-operation, but there is increasing evidence that this generation may fail to preserve and improve upon the legacy for the future.

► CRUCIAL FACTS FOR FUTURE PLANNING DECISION MAKERS

“Ku-ring-gai as a whole is of national and state heritage significance because of the outstanding quantity, quality depth and range of its twentieth century architecture. It contains houses designed by many of Australia’s prominent twentieth century architects which have influenced the mainstream of Australian domestic architecture nationally including John Sulman, Howard Joseland, Hardy Wilson, Leslie Wilkinson and Harry Seidler.” (Ku-ring-gai Council Heritage Statement 2004)

“(In Ku-ring-gai) the areas where much of the beautifully designed heritage housing is located are typically near the Pacific Highway/Railway ridgeline where the topography drops away either side towards the bushland habitat and tall forest which houses Sydney’s largest variety of endangered and threatened species”.

“The two issues – the protection of the natural environment and extensive areas of built and landscape heritage – are valuable legacies of previous generations. The onus is firmly on the current generation to very carefully plan and design new development in order to leave future generations with a better environment”.

“The objective is that each individual development must result in a net environmental improvement (e.g. stormwater flow/quality and tree canopy protection – both fundamental to protecting biodiversity in Ku-ring-gai).”

“Stormwater runoff, sewerage overflows and other negative impacts from urbanization are major issues in Ku-ring-gai because they affect the ring of National Parks around Ku-ring-gai”.

“The importance of maintaining and enhancing the extensive tree canopy in Ku-ring-gai is a key issue because the canopy enables “biolinkages” with the surrounding National Parks for a wide variety of species”.

“Ku-ring-gai exhibits environmental splendour of such a scale it is of national significance.”

“Unique features of Ku-ring-gai include:

- *Most of the last remnants in the Sydney “bioregion” of the toweringly tall Blue Gum forests (the “bioregion” extends from Nelson Bay to Bateman’s Bay and from the coast to the mountains).*
- *The largest number of threatened species (plants and animals) in the bioregion for a local government area. It is noteworthy that Ku-ring-gai has similar numbers of bird and plant species as the entire British Isles.*
- *4 National Parks in and around Ku-ring-gai:*
 - *Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park*
 - *Lane Cove National Park*
 - *Garigal National Park*
 - *Dalrymple Hay Forest National Park (Nature Reserve)”.*

(“Draft Residential Strategy” Travis McEwen Report to Council 2000)

“Gardens really are important. They can provide vital habitat and links for wildlife living in areas such as national parks. The destruction of suburban gardens through medium density and other overdevelopment is, I believe, having a severe deleterious effect on urban wildlife in some areas.”(Message sent by Dr Tim Flannery to Ku-ring-gai (August 1997).

A. Carroll 9498 1807, K. Cowley 9416 9007, J. Langley (Treasurer), K. Pickles (Secretary), M. Galloway, J. Harwood, J. Johnston, J. Kitson, J. Posen, S. Warby, D. Warner.

PLEASE FIND ENCLOSED FOKE MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS FOR 2008.

FOKE RECOMMENDS “IMPACT:” EXHIBITION

“IMPACT: a changing land” is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW until 24.2.08. Opened on 9.11.07 by Professor Tim Flannery, Australian of the Year 2007, this exhibition explores the controversial history of our relationship with the environment over the past 200 years. The story of human impact on the environment of NSW is told through original selected sources from the Library’s collection.

IMPACT: “MERITONISATION” AND KU-RING-GAI.



2000 Ku-ring-gai – the canopy contrasted with Chatswood CBD 2000



Turramurra - under the canopy

“Ku-ring-gai exhibits environmental splendour of such a scale it is of national significance.”
(Ku-ring-gai Planning Consultant 2000.) Taken from Pymble Hill 2000

The unique tree canopy of Ku-ring-gai appears as a green Plimsoll line across the Municipality, providing the distinctive Ku-ring-gai vista of the canopy meeting the sky. The maintenance and enhancement of the tree canopy in Ku-ring-gai is an important key issue - it provides “biolinkages” with the surrounding National Parks for a wide variety of animal species. (See Prof Tim Flannery’s comment)

In 2007, the impact of the State Government’s Local Environmental Plan 194 Stage 1 residential development strategy plan devised for Ku-ring-gai in 2004 is now a reality. Are we preserving the splendid canopy and the extensive architectural legacy as noted in Ku-ring-gai’s Centenary History “*Under the canopy*”, or is Ku-ring-gai facing a concrete Armageddon?



Killara



Lindfield



Wahroonga

Do the highly visible, medium density buildings respect Ku-ring-gai’s historic, scenic and natural urban landscape?



Before Lindfield 2005



Going, going, gone 2005



After Lindfield 2007



Killara



Wahroonga

We can see why the Top Ten Nomination calls for development, particularly urban consolidation, to proceed on an orderly basis balancing the needs of more accommodation with the conservation and protection of the area's scenic, landscape, social and architectural significance.



Pymble- Turramurra



Wahroonga



Pacific Highway Pymble/Turramurra /Wahroonga

Do the Pacific Highway unit sites contribute to Ku-ring-gai's environmental splendour? Centre: over 60 trees were removed from the treed site with only a couple of Blue Gums remaining. A comparison is made with the treed sites shown in montage.



Killara - units under construction



Killara, houses isolated between unit sites



Killara-unit site cleared

When the State Government gazetted its Local Environment Plan (LEP 194) in May 2004, key changes were the removal of Ku-ring-gai Council's provisions, which limited the width of blocks of units and prevented single houses being isolated between blocks of units. These pictures show the outcome of the removal of those provisions.

Urban Consolidation policies aim to encourage greater use of public transport. However a good number of units provide for two car spaces per unit with a number of approved developments seeking additional car spaces. At present, there is no plan and little scope to widen the Pacific Highway to cope with the increased traffic. The Harbour Bridge has limits on the number of train crossings per hour.

In 2004, Council predicted that the State Government's Plan LEP 194 would result in large, bulky, dense developments impacting on the character of Ku-ring-gai. The State Government's Plan allows five storey unit blocks next to single dwellings, whereas Council had proposed graded densities in keeping with surrounding development.

Ku-ring-gai – “an environment which, by virtue of its location, topography, landscape and buildings make it a place of heritage significance.” Emeritus Prof Gareth Roberts, Ku-ring-gai Heritage Awards 1998.

“Heritage consists of those places and objects that we as a community have inherited from the past and want to hand on to future generations.” - NSW Heritage Office Website.