

FOKE Talk

NSW GOVERNMENT PUSH FOR AMALGAMATION



The NSW Government continues to push hard for council amalgamations.

FOKE has joined with a group of non-aligned councils, community groups and individuals in 'Save Our Councils' against forced council amalgamations.

The 'Save Our Councils' website states "The NSW Government wants to significantly reduce the number of councils in NSW and create 'mega councils' with populations in the Sydney metropolitan area of up to 600,000 people – bigger than the whole population of Tasmania."

This will mean that local representation, local accountability & timely and appropriate responsiveness to local needs will effectively end. Local councils reflect the local culture and local values of the community. Large amalgamated councils will not be able to do this – resulting in a loss of identity and place.

Importantly, the loss of local councils will significantly and fatally reduce advocacy for local communities campaigning for better planning laws and for appropriate development and against unpopular projects.

Ku-ring-gai Council is opposed to amalgamation with Hornsby Council & has unanimously voted against amalgamation in April 2015. Not surprisingly, in Council surveys, Ku-ring-gai residents remain strongly opposed to amalgamation.

Ku-ring-gai Council has now submitted a comprehensive review of its services, finances and infrastructure which shows it meets all the government's benchmarks to remain a stand alone Council.

We will now await the Government's response!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With the 2015 Annual FOKE AGM and Public Forum over for another year I am pleased to report that our Public Forum Guest Speaker, renowned architect Philip Thalys was well received. His enthusiastic and insightful talk was well attended with the hall filled to capacity.

I am also pleased to report that our revised FOKE Constitution was passed unanimously by the financial members present at the AGM. Please keep your copy of the Constitution booklet we sent to you prior to the AGM. The approved Constitution is now on the FOKE website.

I would also like to warmly welcome Kerrie Piper and Denise Hendy to FOKE's Committee and thank Deborah Mobberley for her contribution over the past years.

FOKE congratulates the Nature Conservation Council of NSW for its 60th Anniversary and the Environmental Defenders Office for its 30th Anniversary.

Kathy Cowley



RENOWNED ARCHITECT TO PRESENT AT FOKE PUBLIC FORUM | PHILIP THALIS
BSC (ARCH) B ARCH (HONS) SYD UNIV CAAA ARCH URB PARIS-BELLEVILLE

“PLANNING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST”

Philip Thalys, Architect and Urban Planner presented his talk “Planning in the Public Interest” at the 2015 FOKE AGM.

Philip has a unique ability to envision the big picture and is passionate about good sensible design at regional, city and village level.

Below are some key points made by Philip Thalys. Some remain provocative & challenging. Many resonate with our experience.

- 1) **Government decisions are increasingly driven by Treasury’s short term “payback view”.** If this had always been applied then neither the Harbour Bridge or the Opera House would exist today.
- 2) **Public land and buildings should be retained in public ownership** to allow renewal and reuse by future generations. Once sold and strata titled they are lost forever.
- 3) **Sydney lags behind in public transport infrastructure.** Sydney has only 38km of rail lines, barely increased over the past 50 years, and compares poorly to other cities of a similar size that have up to 200km. Building more roads is not the answer.
- 4) **Transport planning and land use should go hand and glove.** The State Government has made some good decisions here but it is sporadic.
- 5) **Brisbane to Melbourne fast train is a key infrastructure project** that would allow the development of larger accessible towns in Australia. Similar to Europe, where people can quickly access the amenity of major cities but not have the close quarters housing pressure that currently exists.
- 6) **Commercial interest on major projects hold extraordinary sway over planning.** For example the opportunity for a new public edge to Sydney at Barangaroo has been lost out to a Casino and office campus.
- 7) **Sydney inner urban areas** particularly along rail corridors need to be better utilised.
- 8) **Apartments tend to be placed on high traffic roads** which have low amenity. Better to develop low rise apartments around park edges.
- 9) **Streets are public spaces** and their design should be a greater part of the public realm. It is how we engage socially.
- 10) **Ku-ring-gai’s tree canopy generated by its geographic position is a great environmental asset.**
- 11) **The planning approval and private certification system is fundamentally dysfunctional.** Poorly designed and constructed apartments are the result. Ku-ring-gai has too many of these!

Good planning outcomes happen when government genuinely consult with stakeholders and the public enthusiastically engages in the future character of our growing city.

Save Our Crown Lands

The FOKE Committee attended the Parliamentary Summit on Crown Land in June, co-hosted by David Shoebridge MLC and Mick Veitch MLC which unanimously opposed the sale of Crown Lands. At the meeting, motions called on all NSW Parliamentary parties to support two resolutions:

- 1. *A full Parliamentary Inquiry, to inquire into and report on the governance of crown land and the most appropriate measures to ensure crown land remains a public asset for the benefit of all the people, the environment, the culture and heritage of this state.*
- 2. *A moratorium on the selling, leasing and private development of crown land until after the Parliamentary Inquiry reports and its recommendations are implemented.*



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Foke Talk Newsletter
 Comments or contributions of articles & photographs are welcome.

BIODIVERSITY LOSS: OUR ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

In young cities like Sydney there are still environmentally sensitive areas like Ku-ring-gai, with ancient forest remnants, now listed as critically endangered ecological communities (CEEC) under state and federal legislation. These rare urban forests still provide habitat for wildlife struggling to survive. Little birds, having disappeared from Ku-ring-gai's vanishing gardens, now depend on habitat protected from threats by humans.



Sheldon Forest, in Pymble, is a textbook example of Sydney's remnant ancient forest still within walking distance of two railway stations. A bird

sanctuary and forest jewel, this rarity is coveted by developers and recreational groups. Of national significance due to its listed community of species, this rare, urban biodiversity showpiece has been shrunk by recreational (RE1) zoning.

Stronger Environmental Zoning Needed

True biodiversity conservation principles require *in situ* protection for such a valuable remnant. RE1 zoning was not the advice or submission of conservation groups. Environmental Conservation (E2) zoning is urgently needed for the full area, to protect Sheldon Forest's rare urban biodiversity from powerful development pressures.

The most valuable and vulnerable narrow end of Sheldon Forest now needs to be completely protected for its listed fauna and flora for our future city.

The only way this last Blue Gum High Forest stretching to the Pacific Highway will survive is under FULL E2 conservation zoning.

Current development has excavated sensitive soils and seed-banks by removing hundreds of gardens. Entire streets have been replaced with concrete in this environmentally sensitive area.

Good governance entails planning-with-foresight to protect rare urban vegetation for future city populations.

The fundamental capacity for wildlife habitat to regenerate is being cumulatively lost to development and recreation pressures across Ku-ring-gai. ■



Help Us to Protect Sheldon Forest !

Please write to the Minister for Planning, Mr Rob Stokes, and the Minister for the Environment, Mr Speakman, asking them to eliminate recreational (RE1) zoning in Sheldon Forest and apply the highest conservation (E2) zoning FULLY across Sheldon Forest.

Thus safeguarding "in perpetuity" this irreplaceable tiny island of rare urban biodiversity.

Included with this newsletter is an updated list of contacts in order to contact the media and your local politicians.

Please keep this handy as we have seen the successful impact of *People Power* on our politicians' planning decisions.



FOKE's Walks Celebrating the National Trust's Heritage Festival, May 2015

A booklet was created for each walk which more fully explains the heritage and environmental significance of the walks. The booklets are available from the FOKE website.

2015 FOKE Heritage Festival Event
in association with the National Trust's Heritage Festival

Annie Wyatt Walk

Tree Lovers' Civic League planting 1910. Courtesy National Trust of Australia (2010) Archives.

Sunday 3 May, 2015
Gordon Railway Station, Ticket Office at 10 am. Walk finished at 12 noon.

Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment was formed in 1994 to defend and promote Ku-ring-gai's cultural and natural heritage.

The **Annie Wyatt Walk** highlighted the founder of the National Trust, Annie Wyatt [1885-1961] who lived in Gordon and was pivotal in highlighting Ku-ring-gai's heritage.

2015 FOKE Heritage Festival Event
in association with the National Trust's Heritage Festival

Sheldon Forest Walk

Sunday 10 May, 2015
Sheldon Forest Entrance, George Road, off Pacific Hwy, Turramurra at 10am. Walk finished at 12 noon.

Bushcare in Sheldon Forest

Bushcare for Sheldon Forest is held on the 1st Sunday of each month. New members welcome. For more information contact: Jane Harwood 9488 1443.

Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment was formed in 1994 to defend and promote Ku-ring-gai's cultural and natural heritage.

The **Sheldon Forest Walk** highlighted just how rare Ku-ring-gai's Blue Gum High Forest is and how it is in urgent need of protection.

2015 FOKE Heritage Festival Event
in association with the National Trust's Heritage Festival

Turramurra Heritage Walk

Sunday 17 May, 2015
Turramurra Railway Station at 10 am. Walk finished at 12 noon.

Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment was formed in 1994 to defend and promote Ku-ring-gai's cultural and natural heritage.

The **Turramurra Heritage Walk** highlighted the unique heritage precincts of Turramurra and how any future development must respect this heritage significance.

Heritage Rosemoran SAVED!



In late June we have seen a significant decision by the Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP) Pre Gateway review to reject unanimously an application to rezone Rosemoran, 1574-78 Pacific Highway Wahroonga, to high density.

This is the first case from Ku-ring-gai to come before the pre-gateway review. Panel members upheld the decision taken by Ku-ring-gai Council in April 2014 to reject an application for rezoning.

This is an important decision for Ku-ring-gai as it upholds a decision made by the Councillors against the recommendation of an independent assessor employed by Council's Planning Department, which recommended in favour of high density rezoning. Councillors were unanimous in their decision to reject the rezoning application and now the Pre Gateway Panel has also been unanimous in their support for this rejection.

This site has had a long history of development applications in a number of forms, all of which have been vigorously

opposed by local residents and community groups, including FOKE. The Wahroonga Westside Residents' Group has been instrumental in gathering expert reports and lobbying Councillors, the Planning Minister and NSW Planning Department officials in regard to this site.

Residents should take some comfort from the fact that the pre gateway decision upholds the zoning contained in the KLEP. The current Planning Minister Rob Stokes has made a number of statements about the dangers and inappropriateness of 'single block rezonings' and this JRPP decision has supported these statements in practice. ■

Who holds Balance of Power in NSW?

We congratulate both Alister Henskens and Jonathan O'Dea on their success in the 2015 NSW Election.

Disappointingly, neither representative has signed the Community Charter, *Planning for the People*, as developed by Better Planning Network, National Trust, Nature Conservation Council and more. To read about the Charter, go to www.thecommunitycharter.org

In the current scenario the Liberal Government needs only the 2 Christian Democrats to pass most legislation. Unfortunately, the Christian Democrats have proven themselves to side with the Liberals on most development and planning issues, despite vocal public opposition.

To ensure our unique Ku-ring-gai retains the character and amenity we all enjoy, as residents we will need to voice our concerns strongly to ALL our representatives.

Update: Code 10/50 Vegetation Clearing

After much abuse of the code by people removing trees for reasons other than bushfire risk, e.g. increased views, leaves dropping on driveways and, of course, development purposes, the NSW Government cut the entitlement area from 350m to 100m from bushland. This did not halt the abuse, as even small suburban reserves were required to be mapped as bushland.

The 2-year review was brought forward after a mere 3 months of its commencement. There were 3,579 submissions, of which 97% called for a repeal of the legislation and/or a moratorium. At a recent meeting of community representatives, the Deputy Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service [RFS], whilst non-

committal, recognised there were problems with the code and that a report to Parliament on the review was imminent.



Since that meeting a Freedom of Information request yielded a document by the RFS in 2009 to the Victorian Government prior to the introduction of its 10/30 rule after the Black Saturday fires. The NSW RFS advises Victoria that, "this ap-

proach may not generate the safety outcomes that the community is hoping for, and in fact may result in some people being more vulnerable. Protection from bush fire revolves around a suite of measures ranging from building design and maintenance, ember protection, general property management, focused advice on vegetation management, and evacuation/relocation planning. NSW provides this whole-of-suite approach via site visits."

Just 5 years later, the NSW Government ignored this expert advice and legislated for Code 10/50. It is therefore difficult to see how the NSW Government will not be forced to repeal the legislation without making itself vulnerable to litigation after the next wildfire. ■