



FRIENDS OF
KU-RING-GAI
ENVIRONMENT INC.

March 2010

Dear FOKE Members

FOKE'S 2010 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & PUBLIC FORUM

Accompanying this Newsletter is the separate Notice of FOKE'S AGM.
We value your membership and look forward to seeing you at the AGM.

- DATE:** Thursday 15th April 2010
TIME: 7.15pm followed by the Public Forum which will commence at 8.00pm following the conclusion of FOKE's 2010 AGM.
VENUE: Killara Uniting Church Hall corner Karranga Ave and Arnold St ("Fiveways") Killara.

Please note that the AGM is starting at the earlier time of 7.15 pm, and that this year's AGM is being held on a Thursday night.

MR DICK SMITH AO

"Populate – Perish or Prosper?"

We are delighted that Mr Dick Smith AO, Australian of the Year 1986, has accepted FOKE's invitation to be the 2010 Guest speaker at the Public Forum that will follow the AGM.

Prime Minister Rudd's plan for a "Big Australia" is to grow Australia's population to 36 million by 2050.

What is happening now in Ku-ring-gai is a forerunner for what is in store for communities across Sydney and, indeed, the country under the plan for "Big Australia". Governments will continue to require greater densification to house an increasing population. High rise will dominate over proportionate housing. There will be minimal public utility planning, maximum transport chaos and congestion, over-stretched health facilities, additional pressure on water and food resources. Our built heritage and natural environment will be under pressure or eradicated under the weight of over-development.

This is what we are seeing in Ku-ring-gai right now. Imagine the scenario in 2050 if "Big Australia" is allowed to come to fruition without communities being heard.



Mr Smith, founder of Australian Geographic, business man, aviator, explorer and film-maker received the Lindbergh Award in 1992, an annual world-wide award given to one individual for lifetime achievement for a balance between technical advancement and environmental preservation. Mr Smith grew up in Ku-ring-gai.

“OVERSUPPLY CLAIMS ANOTHER DEVELOPER” Australian Financial Review 2.3.10

Under Stage 1, the valued and valuable landscape quality and heritage of Ku-ring-gai are fast disappearing amid the proliferation of “unwanted” multi storey air-conditioned, eave-less apartment blocks with massive areas of glass and thousands of air-conditioning units. The proposed Stage 2 Town Centre buildings 9 storeys high will, if approved by the Minister, further shred the protective tree canopy and tower above it. The flooding impacts from Stage 1 (page 4) do not augur well for Stage 2.



Left: Looking south east from Culworth Ave Killara showing homes protected by the cooling, carbon absorbing, and nationally-significant tree canopy.

Centre: Looking south west from the same location showing a starkly contrasting view. The development is the one featured in “Oversupply claims another developer.”

Right: The same site from the street. The green mantle of Ku-ring-gai is being replaced by a concrete tower agenda with sites moonscaped and developments leaving minimal space for tall canopy trees and understorey planting (improved microclimate). Over 3000 trees have been lost over the last 4 years and family homes within heritage areas have been bulldozed and reduced to rubble.

The Sydney Morning Herald (9.2.10) reported that Austruc Construction was placed into liquidation with \$27 million in unpaid debts, leaving many small businesses across NSW facing ruin. The Australian Financial Review’s “Oversupply claims another Developer” (2.3.10) reported that the company's residential development sites on Culworth Avenue (and Bruce Street) Killara suffered weak pre-sales. An industry spokesperson was reported as saying “the market was simply oversupplied” and “the presumption was that there would be a huge market for downsizers, looking for spacious high end apartments – the benefit of hindsight has shown us this is not the case”.

These reports follow a previous article in the Sydney Morning Herald (16.1.10) entitled “Vacancy rates paint mixed rental picture” which reported that the research company SQM Research found that “Some of the highest vacancy rates in Sydney are in the upper north shore, where a glut of dwellings sits empty: 7.5 percent in Gordon and 7 percent in Pymble.

An SQM property analyst stated: “The construction of large expensive units and townhouses in the Ku-ring-gai area was a factor in the high vacancy rates there. I think a number of these blocks have targeted a demographic that isn’t there. If I had a choice between a house with a large backyard or an apartment, both for around \$700,000 I know what I would pick.”

Under Stage 1 alone, 700 Ku-ring-gai family homes of some heritage significance have been rezoned for medium to high density for a target of 10,000 new dwellings. In just 5 years 5,000 new dwellings have been approved. Another 2,000 new dwellings (approx) are set to be or may be approved by the Minister under Part 3 A applications e.g. SAN Hospital site Wahroonga, UTS site Lindfield, “Rippon Grange” Wahroonga & 3 SEPP 53 Targeted (Major Projects) sites.

If the State Government approves Stage 2 the Draft LEP (Town Centres) 2008 there will be the potential for in excess of 16,000 units to be built in Ku-ring-gai over the next few years. It must not be approved. Not only are the costs to our environment and amenity too high, there are no real plans to either widen the Pacific Highway (Metro Road 1), lengthen its turning bays, or broaden the already choked railway underpasses that connect east to west to cope with the massive increases in cars. Poor, dense planning.

WE ARE BEING MISLEAD and “SOLD OFF” TO OVERSEAS INVESTORS

- ▶ The State Government Stage 1 urban densification policies were intended to provide housing choice. Not so. Only medium to high rise apartments are being developed. Where are the villas and townhouses?
- ▶ We have been told by the State Government that our ageing population wants to live in medium and high density housing and that this type of housing is needed to cater for changing demographics e.g. more single parent families. Not so. Ku-ring-gai Council has recently undertaken a Residents Preference Housing Survey, the results of which showed that only 7% of residents want to live in medium and high density buildings. www.kmc.nsw.gov.au
- ▶ We have been told by the State Government that housing will be affordable. Not so. However, overseas investors are finding these properties to be attractive investments so prices are remaining high. Most of the units are priced well above the first home owner’s threshold and range up to \$2 million per unit.
- ▶ **We understand some high density developments have been sold directly off the plan to overseas investors. Some of these apartments come onto the market for rental only. Some remain empty e.g. land banking strategies. Sales reports confirm the trend to overseas purchasers.**

The Australian Financial Review 2.3.10 “*Oversupply claims another developer*” stated: “RALAN which is clearly the dominant player after collecting 11 sites on the North Shore, gained approval this year for a 68 unit development on the Warrawee site. It has already achieved pre-commitments of over 85% on the site.”... “Ralan Managing Director William O’Dwyer said he just happened to be in the right position at the right time. It is a good opportunity – in any crisis there are good opportunities”. “Mr O’Dwyer said that his developments had gone so well that he had the support of his banks and that put him in a position to take advantage of what demand there was available”. **we also have a big rent roll- we are finding that it is very strong”. (Emphasis added)**

Right and below: RALAN developments many of which are for the rental market.



- ▶ The Australian Financial Review 3.3 10 “*Developers on lending alert*” quoted Mr Harry Triguboff of Meriton: “The Chinese buyers believe Australian residential prices are cheap compared with China” ... “Our prices are very far behind China”.. “Sales are going very well there is no question about that. The Chinese love the (Sydney’s) North Shore because it has got very good schools.”
- ▶ There is concern that high density unit developments close to schools may be a source of “off campus” housing for overseas students. An apartment building is currently proposed opposite a school comprising predominately one bedroom apartments. Who will look after the day- to-day welfare of these children if their parents are domiciled overseas?

KU-RING-GAI FOR SALE

FOKE’s video “Ku-ring-gai for Sale” on Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/user/FOKEsydney> shows the adverse impact just from “Stage 1” with family homes within heritage areas in Ku-ring-gai being destroyed.

The planning process for Ku-ring-gai is flawed as the Government failed to begin the process by first identifying and protecting the natural and cultural items despite the existence of authoritative studies.

For more images see www.foke.org.au

DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOWN CENTRE INCREASES THE RISK OF FLASH FLOODING IN THE GORDON VALLEY.

The viability of high rise development along the ridge line of the Gordon Valley requires serious reassessment, following the flooding that occurred in the lower valley during the heavy rainfall of March 6. During the 30 minute deluge, sewerage and stormwater management systems in areas below the ridge line failed, generating torrents of water that surged into the natural water easements that run down through the valley to Blackbutt Creek. A number of properties in Dumaresq, Vale and MacIntyre Streets were flooded. Water levels rose to 1.5 metres at 18 Vale Street, the house and garden were completely inundated, the car swept across the garden.

It has long been known by Council that the valley is susceptible to flash flooding. A Council Engineer, who was invited to view the damage in Dumaresq Street, confirmed that Council has records of similar flooding in this area in 1985 but noted that Council, despite the increased development that will occur in the Town Centre on the ridge line, has no plans to mitigate against any future risk. There was also little concern expressed for foreseeable flood risk associated with the service road planned by Council to cater for the increased traffic flows that will be generated in the town centre. There is no doubt that this road, which crosses from McIntyre to Moree Street along the natural contours of the valley, will effectively channel any future overflows generated in the upper valley directly into the natural easements and, as occurred on Saturday night, into the homes below.

It is difficult to understand, given the proven susceptibility of the Gordon Valley to flooding and the likelihood of such extreme weather events increasing with global warming, why Gordon was chosen as a Town Centre in the first place. Whatever happened to the precautionary principle? *(Resident contribution)*

INCREASED FLOOD RISK IN KU RING GAI

The North Shore Times, reported on 17 February, *High rise design faults blamed for severe flooding, that "some new five and six storey apartment buildings have not been properly designed to cope with heavy rainfalls and are being badly flooded.....(the SES) had to attend large carparks which were completely flooded and once the pits filled they couldn't be pumped out."*

The recent 1 in 20 year rain event experienced in March 2010 highlights the impact of development on the flood risk to homes and property.

Ku-ring gai generally has the highest rainfall in Sydney. This, combined with the naturally hilly topography along the ridgeline and the numerous Riparian Zones, raises questions regarding the adequacy and success of stormwater management associated with new developments.

High rise development substantially increases the built upon area, significant amounts of trees and vegetation are removed; and deep excavation occurs in order to build massive carparks, all of which impacts on existing stormwater flow paths and the natural groundwater regimes.

This is important as numerous Riparian Zones and creeks feed into the larger waterbodies such as the Lane Cove River and Middle Harbour. Preservation of water quality at the top of the catchment is essential as it impacts on the quality of water downstream and ultimately Sydney water.

New developments are required to preserve the integrity of natural watercourses - they should not increase the impact of flood events or detrimentally affect neighbouring properties. *(Resident contribution)*

EVERYONE! PLEASE RAISE ALL NEWSLETTER ISSUES WITH PREMIER KENEALLY & MINISTER KELLYINVOLVE THE MEDIA!

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Sincerely Foke Committee

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