

foke



FRIENDS OF
KU-RING-GAI
ENVIRONMENT INC.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 24 MAY 2017

'Forced amalgamations are anti-democratic and a step backward. It would be one thing if the electorate of Ku-ring-gai had determined that it would be best to amalgamate with Hornsby. But there is a big difference between top-down forced amalgamations and amalgamations that arise from the people themselves. Voluntary amalgamations have a better chance of succeeding than those that are forced.'

However, forced amalgamations dilute the voice of voters, and without their consent. Usually, as in New South Wales, it is argued that larger government units will be more efficient, exercising economies of scale. The reality is all too often that the economies of scale that are actually achieved are only for special interests, not for the people or their pocket books.' Wendell Cox, Newgeography.com 31 March 2017

2016 has been a year of rollercoasters for those of us passionate about our sense of place - Ku-ring-gai! And, so far, 2017 appears to be the same.

● AMALGAMATION

Ku-ring-gai Council is still at the crossroads as to whether the Berejiklian Government will get its way and ultimately merge Ku-ring-gai with the Hornsby Shire or leave it as a stand-alone council. We hope it's the latter.

Incredibly, despite the recent Court of Appeal's undeniable win announced by Justice Sackville on 27 March 2017, Ku-ring-gai Council and residents are still being told that it is the Government's intention to proceed with the merger with Hornsby. Ku-ring-gai's important and valued cultural history could still be relegated to the history books with a 'stroke of a Minister's pen'. It is essential that we continue to raise our voices against such move!

As we stated in last year's report, there is no sense or logic in the proposed merger as Ku-ring-gai Council already services one of the larger populated metropolitan areas in Sydney. The Merger Proposal as presented by NSW Government did not highlight any improvements whatsoever 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 would be enormous.

The merging of Ku-ring-gai with Hornsby Shire would result in being one of the largest districts 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 Government amalgamation consultation process was a pre-determined farce perpetrated by politicians obsessed with fast-tracking development at all costs. The community consultation was alarmingly undemocratic with submissions made to Government appointed Delegate Gary West, who was found to have denied the community ‘procedural fairness’. The lack of detail in the cost benefit analysis was appalling, with the Government refusing to release the credible evidence that claims the amalgamations will bring savings and ‘efficiencies’ to local government.

Any amalgamation savings would result only from 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. Ku-ring-gai would result in being represented by six councillors to Hornsby’s nine - completely unbalanced representation that would result in Ku-ring-gai’s six councillors potentially being out voted on every planning issue affecting this area.

Professor Dollery, an acknowledged expert on Council amalgamations, emphasized last year that mergers do not add up. He and his university colleague Professor Drew have produced this evidence following their detailed studies of amalgamations in Queensland:

‘The 2008 forced merger program in Queensland has fallen short of its proclaimed objectives. Indeed, the result has been such a mess that several highly expensive de-amalgamations have taken place, squandering millions of scarce public funds. In a study of the impact of the Queensland mergers on council efficiency, Dana McQuestin, Joseph Drew and I found no statistically significant difference in the efficiency of amalgamated and non-amalgamated Queensland. This was principally due to increased spending on staffing expenses and comparatively larger operational expenditure.

The current NSW merger program further illustrates the foolishness of forced amalgamation. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been fruitlessly expended by NSW councils on expensive for-profit consulting companies, like KPMG, lawyers, lobbyists and the like to show that they complied with the ever-changing goalposts set up by the Baird Government.

These outlays have been more than matched by financial sweeteners by the Baird Government in the form of subsidies to forcibly amalgamated municipalities. These public funds could have been much more productively spent on needed local infrastructure and other bona fide local government activities.’

FOKE continues to believe there would be no benefit from a merger with Hornsby. There is mounting evidence that amalgamations are being driven to suit the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) agenda for high growth that will benefit the property industry, which will push for higher densities, overdevelopment and opportunistic profits at the expense of the environment, heritage and local identity of our area.

Ku-ring-gai Council commenced a court challenge on the forced amalgamation with Hornsby Council in the Land and Environment Court on 18 May 2016.

On 20 September, Justice Tim Moore delivered his judgement in which he declined to make orders preventing the forcible merger. As a result, Ku-ring-gai Council was found to be only ‘partially successful’ in its case against a forced merger with Hornsby Shire.

Council then lodged an appeal against the Land and Environment Court ruling, which resulted in the hearing on 16 and 17 February 2017 in the Court of Appeals Supreme Court of NSW.

With new Premier Berejiklian’s initial posturing to meet the demands of the National Party to stop forced amalgamations in regional NSW, we had hoped for a more consultative and respectful outcome.

Disappointingly, on 14th February of this year, Premier Berejiklian continued to ignore the outcry of residents and Councils to stop the Government’s agenda to force amalgamations. Whilst agreeing to stop mergers in the country due to the National Party’s strong lobbying following the Orange by-election Liberal Party defeat, she caved into the wishes of the property industry and big business by continuing to insist on merging Metropolitan councils.

When he announced the Court of Appeals decision on 27 March 2017, Justice Sackville was particularly critical of the role of the NSW State Government appointed ‘independent’ Delegate, former National Party MP Garry West. The Court ruled that Mr West failed to fulfil his statutory function by not assessing a confidential KPMG document, referring to the financial implications of mergers.

Writing in the opinion, Judge J. A. Basten said: ‘The Council was right to assert that the delegate could not properly carry out his function of examination without having access to that material...’ and found ‘that the financial advantages identified by KPMG for the government were a critical element in favour of the merger, but this analysis was not provided to the delegate or public’. Judge Basten concluded that Mr. West had ‘constructively failed’ in his statutory duty of examining the government’s merger proposal, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported.

In addition, Judge Basten pointed out that: ‘Release of the material was also necessary for public participation in the public inquiry to be meaningful.’ According to the opinion: ‘The appellant was denied procedural fairness as the delegate chose to rely on the KPMG analysis, rather than conducting his own assessment of the merger, when the appellant was not in possession of the document in which the analysis was contained.’ Ku-ring-gai Council was awarded costs.

A number of Sydney councils are also challenging the Land and Environment Court rulings in the NSW Supreme Court of Appeal—Mosman, North Sydney, Strathfield, Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove. Woollahra Council has taken their Appeal to the High Court. The results should be known within weeks or months in Woollahra’s High Court case.

We need to hold our politicians responsible for the Government’s undemocratic actions at the State elections in 2018 if they continue to support the merger with Hornsby against the wishes of the vast majority of residents who are completely opposed to amalgamation.

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

Throughout 2016 FOKE has continued to work closely with the Save Our Council's Coalition (SOCC) to oppose forced amalgamation and attended rallies and meetings with groups from all over NSW opposed to mergers. SOCC also campaigned across NSW regional and country areas. We believe their efforts in galvanising and co-ordinating campaigns across NSW put pressure on the National Party and are why Deputy Premier John Barilaro MP made it clear to the Premier that he would not be supporting mergers in the country.

During the year FOKE attended a number of media conferences organised by SOCC and held behind Parliament House in the Domain with the various politicians opposed to forced amalgamations. The FOKE banners and signs were quite prominent in the media broadcasts. Without the publicity that radio announcer Alan Jones AO has given to forced amalgamations on his radio show, the issue would not have had the impetus it has had, particularly in the Orange by-election held on 12 November 2016.

A number of residents of Ku-ring-gai assisted SOCC in this year's April 8 by-election of North Shore and Manly where Independents standing against forced amalgamation resulted in massive swings of up to 18 percent against the Government. Safe Liberal seats are becoming increasingly marginal seats.

At a local level FOKE continued to work and liaise with a number of Ku-ring-gai community groups and have established the Ku-ring-gai Alliance of Community Groups. 'Save Ku-ring-gai' Facebook page has been active in recording the events and media articles on the topic of amalgamation and the recent win by Ku-ring-gai Council in the NSW Court of Appeals. We received this letter from the President of SOCC, Phil Jenkyn OAM.

'Save Our Councils Coalition would like to congratulate all members of the Ku-ring-gai community and Councillors who stood up in this battle against forced amalgamations – fighting for their local council and for local democracy.

Your courage and determination in supporting court action has not only exposed a deeply flawed process but one that is contrary to law.

The ramifications of the court of appeal decision are huge and it has given great heart to many communities and councils across NSW.'

As for FOKE, we will continue to lobby our politicians and the Government to stop the merger until Ku-ring-gai remains a stand-alone council. We will never give up hope of saving Ku-ring-gai.

● **THE BETTER PLANNING NETWORK NSW**

FOKE continues to be involved in supporting the Better Planning Network (BPN), which is a community organisation of more than 460 community groups across NSW.

The Better Planning Network has a mission to establish a fairer, more transparent and accountable planning system in NSW. The changes to the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act that the Planning Minister Rob Stokes announced in 2016 have continued

despite a recent cabinet re-shuffle. Minister Anthony Roberts is now the new Planning Minister.

With many of the White Paper 'reforms' introduced through a process of stealth since 2013, the Minister said the central themes in the failed 2013 planning 'reforms' will be the starting point.

In addition, the Planning Department will continue to rationalise the number and scope of State Environmental Planning Policies. A review of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 was undertaken with amendments circulated for public comment in early 2017, with views sought on a Regulatory Impact Statement and draft Regulation later this year.

• GREATER SYDNEY COMMISSION (GSC)—NORTH DISTRICT PLANS

As mentioned in FOKE's 2016 report, Minister Robert Stokes commissioned the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) headed by Chief Commissioner Lucy Turnbull and CEO Sarah Hill. Prime Minister Turnbull's wife is not only chairing the Greater Sydney Commission but is able to sit in on NSW Cabinet discussions. The GSC has very significant powers and in November 2016 the FOKE committee attended a briefing session at Parramatta. At this session Mrs Turnbull, as Chief Commissioner, Sarah Hill, CEO and the six District Commissioners, including Dr Deborah Dearing, the North District Commissioner, presented the draft District Plans that were on public exhibition for comment until 31 March 2017. A copy of the FOKE submission on the North District Plan has been placed on the FOKE website.

FOKE is meeting with Dr Dearing, the North District Commissioner, on 31 May to discuss FOKE's concerns about the draft North District Plans and how they will impact Ku-ring-gai.

The GSC has proposed 4,000 new dwellings for Ku-ring-gai over the next five years. Staff have advised councillors to expect 16,000 new dwellings within the next 20 years.

We are also being advised by Dr Dearing and MP Jonathan O'Dea that the 4,000 proposed new dwellings are already built into existing council planning documents. Mr O'Dea wrote on 5 January 2017:

'It appears that the independent GSC estimate of 4,000 additional dwellings from existing planning instruments stems from the previous local rezonings/plans formulated under Labor's planning panel, which the Liberal Party removed promptly after its election in 2011.

For the record, my personal view on respecting the 10,000 dwellings target to 2031 has not changed. However, I have never indicated that I am in a position to speak for the whole government and do not do so. There is a process to be followed in setting new metropolitan targets for 2036 that will involve further community consultation.'

We have received the Department of Planning's new dwelling data for Ku-ring-gai to October 2016 and we understand that 9,669 new dwellings have been approved since 2004 - hence 300 short of meeting the 10,000 target (from 2004 -2031)! Approximately 7,000 have been recorded as constructed and completed. We understand that 2,000 to 3,000 approved units are in the process of being built or to be commenced.

The GSC's information now needs to be updated as the 10,000 target has been reached within the last 13 years.

Our meeting with Dr Dearing proposes to clarify these issues and to demonstrate and highlight Ku-ring-gai's dilemma in providing any additional new housing, particularly along the environmentally sensitive North Shore railway/Pacific Highway corridor and St Ives, without further compromising Ku-ring-gai's character, its natural and built heritage.

● SINGLE DWELLING ZONING UNDER ATTACK

NSW Planning's proposed legislation, called the draft Medium Density Housing Code, aims to extend medium density development throughout current low density single dwelling (R2 zone) residential areas as complying development. Under complying development, developers will not need to get development application approval and, although required to inform neighbours, the neighbours will have no right to object. As long as the developments meet a predetermined set of guidelines they can be fast-tracked through Council. Currently, the R3 zone has been specifically designed to deliver medium density. The proposed plan is to allow medium density development on all residential (single dwelling) R2 land in NSW with a street frontage of 12m or more and a minimum lot size of 400sqm, allowing up to five townhouses on a lot of 1,000 square metres.

The medium density complying developments include townhouses, terraces, manor homes (two up, two down) and dual occupancies. This proposal applies a blanket rezoning for 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. It overrides local environment plans and planning controls to the detriment of residents. FOKE has made a submission against this extension of complying development.

● BAIRD'S WEAKENED BIODIVERSITY LAWS

The State Government introduced a Biodiversity *Conservation Act*, in May 2016, to fast-track land-clearing approvals to appease big agribusiness and property developers. The *Biodiversity Conservation Act* was passed to replace the *Native Vegetation Act* and the *Threatened Species Act*. The 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 one million animal deaths over 10 years.

Before the election, the State Government committed to 'enhancing the state's biodiversity to benefit current and future generations' but yet another promise has been broken in favour of a pro-development agenda that weakens nature protection laws.

Premier Baird and his Liberal Party MPs, including those representing Ku-ring-gai and Davidson, voted in November 2016 in favour of the extinction of nature with their flawed, reckless and biased Biodiversity Conservation and Local Land Services Amendment Act. Despite thousands of submissions against these anti-environment laws, the Liberal Party shamefully caved into pressure from the National Party. The Liberal Party's environmental credibility is now severely damaged by putting wildlife, trees and climate at risk.

To this extent, one of Baird's senior advisors on this legislation, Professor Possingham, resigned in November stating that the package is bad for biodiversity. Similarly, The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists have described this funding as a 'taxpayer subsidy for farmers to degrade land'. These laws will put Ku-ring-gai's environment at risk. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the umbrella group for NSW's environment groups (including FOKE), promised that the campaign to repeal these laws that exacerbate extinction will not go away - until they are repealed.

We need a new vision to protect, restore and ensure resilience for our precious biodiversity. FOKE sent in a submission strongly opposing the proposed detrimental changes.

Though the submission period has finished, we urge members to write to your State representatives, MPs Alister Henskens and Jonathan O'Dea, regarding your objection to this legislation.

● **LOSS OF MORE KU-RING-GAI COMMUNITY ASSETS**

In February 2017, Ku-ring-gai Councillors voted to consign another Public Asset for development. Council planners recommended allowing the development of the small green space in Turramurra, known as the Little Village Park. This decision was made despite an independent inquiry's recommendation to retain this space in the middle of a future massive town-hub development. It was quite obvious from the tenor of the debate at the February Council meeting that it has been the planners' intention to earmark it for further development for years.

The original station master's cottage was situated on the site of the Little Village Park in the 1890s, when the North Shore Line opened. This unique historical Little Village Park should remain for posterity.

This vote illustrates the development-driven system that the residents of NSW are enduring under the current State Government.

Last September, the Lindfield Library and Senior Centre site was reclassified as operational land by Ku-ring-gai Council. Overall, 26 community assets have now been reclassified by our Council to pay predominantly for the purchase of the 'SUN' administration building and to increase revenue.

FOKE is currently campaigning to save the Turramurra's Little Village Park, adjacent to the Turramurra railway station and have just organised two banners for this purpose.

With so many council-owned properties and open space, such as car parks, being rationalised for more high-rise development, where will the community facilities and public spaces exist for current and future generations' benefit and use?

● **SHELDON FOREST EDUCATIONAL SIGNS**

Ku-ring-gai Council granted FOKE a further \$1,360 following our successful nomination for an Environmental Grant to produce educational signs for display in Sheldon Forest. The signs are identical to the earlier signs that John Martyn of STEP Inc. designed for the Council grant in 2013. The new signs are now ready to be installed in Sheldon Forest by Council. We thank Ku-ring-gai Council for awarding FOKE the second grant.

FOKE conducted another Sheldon Forest Walk earlier this month of May as part of the National Trust Heritage Festival to highlight the need to protect and preserve this important threatened and endangered ecological community.

● **FOKE WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK**

My thanks go to FOKE's webmaster Ursula Bonzol. Ursula is now updating the website while Graham Lewis, our former webmaster, is still on hand to give Ursula assistance when needed. We hope members will find the website a good information resource. The website records up-to-date media releases and newsletters and specific information on our campaign issues.

FOKE's (*Friendsofkringgai*) Facebook page is updated almost daily with articles, comment and stories pertaining to FOKE's interests! The readership of the Facebook page is on the increase. Facebook has enabled us to promote petitions such as 'Stop Forced Amalgamation of Councils', 'Save the Trees on Stanhope Road Killara', our annual Public Forum, our NTHF Walks, and other topics and events that may be of interest to our readers. Facebook is like a day-to-day diary and is a great resource and storage bank to record newspaper articles and other stories of interest to FOKE from a wider field.

We encourage members to log on, contribute to the discussions, 'like' our Facebook page and post comments on the articles and news, such as the electronic newsletters.

● **FOKE'S SUBMISSIONS - GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PLANS**

FOKE has sent submissions to the State Government on the Greater Sydney Commission's Draft North District Plans, 'The Missing Middle' - Medium Density Housing Code SEPP, the Biodiversity Conservation Act, the Amendments to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and Ku-ring-gai Council's Draft Destination Management Plan, just to name a few submissions despatched by FOKE over 2016 to 2017. We have issued several media releases based on some of the submissions.

● **FOKE's ENVIRONMENTAL SUB-COMMITTEE**

FOKE's environmental sub-committee, set up in 2014, 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. Ongoing, we highlight these issues with several walks which are planned for and conducted during the National Trust Heritage Festivals.

FOKE's 2015 National Trust Heritage Festival Walks were awarded a highly commended prize in the Category 'Tours' at the National Trust Heritage Awards Luncheon in 2016.

Much of the credit for this award must go to Janine Kitson and Janet Harwood who plan and conduct the events each year. Through their efforts last year FOKE donated \$1,500 to the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) following the successful raffle and lunch at *Pecorino* in Gordon. Another EDO fund raising lunch was held for FOKE's 2017 National Trust Heritage Festival on 21 May.

With Council plans to commercially redevelop the Turramurra Ray Street Precinct and public car park with seven-storey development, the sub-committee has stepped up a campaign to highlight the lack of open space and parkland planned for such a large commercial development.

As highlighted earlier in this report, Little Village Park adjacent to the Turramurra railway station is now under threat from commercial development following Council's adverse decision to rezone it. The current park and open space are important to Turramurra to offset what is being lost to development on the carpark, so the sub-committee is continuing to campaign to try and stop the park from being developed.

Because the threat of re-developing the local heritage-listed *Hillview* and urban conservation area (UCA) site for high density development is detrimental to the heritage character of Turramurra's intact group of early architectural buildings, the sub-committee wrote a detailed paper nominating *Hillview* and surrounds for State Heritage listing but, sadly, was unsuccessful.

In celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the incorporation of a parcel of Blue Gum High Forest into Dalrymple Hay Forest, Nancy Pallin led our FOKE walk on 7 May 2017 as part of the National Trust Heritage Festival in Ku-ring-gai. Nancy Pallin is the former Chair of the Blue Gum High Forest Group who led the campaign to save this extremely important Sydney forest of which there is only one percent remaining globally.

The sub-committee has been in discussion with other environmental groups on how to protect and preserve the Sheldon Forest. FOKE's aim is to upgrade the Sheldon Forest to Nature Reserve status to give greater protection to its wildlife and habitat.

● 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. FOKE has joined forces with 13 community groups under the banner of the Ku-ring-gai Alliance of Community Groups.

⊖ FOKE continues to respond to verbal and written requests from students studying town planning, architecture and journalism who seek information on local planning in Ku-ring-gai.

⊖ The FOKE-awarded *Jan Langley Prize* for environment and sustainability excellence at East Lindfield Public School was presented in December 2016 to Year Five student Polly James. FOKE presents 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 at the East Lindfield Public School.

We are also most grateful for the assistance Philip Langley provides in setting up, and storage of, the display boards we use each year at our AGM.

The committee is in the process discussing another prize at a local school in honour of former committee member Jean Posen who passed away on 26 January 2017.

☉ We thank committee member Carolyn Darby for her patience and vigilance in sitting through fortnightly Council meetings and reporting on matters of importance and interest to FOKE and for editing the President's Report.

☉ FOKE representatives, along with Better Planning Network affiliates, attended the annual Sydney University Henry Halloran Forum and community forums and planning sessions held by Better Planning Network as well as committee meetings of the Save Our Councils Coalition.

● GOODBYE JEAN POSEN— COMMITTEE MEMBER

Jean Katie Posen, a committee member of FOKE for 16 years, passed away on 26 January 2017 after a debilitating illness earlier in the year. A number of FOKE members attended Jean's memorial service at this Killara Uniting Church Hall. Council paid tribute to her valued contribution to Ku-ring-gai and FOKE. The following information was supplied and incorporated into the Mayoral Minute tribute on 7 February 2017.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the passing of Jean Katie Posen, a longstanding Ku-ring-gai resident and passionate member of our community. Jean trained and worked as a physiotherapist but in her spare time, devoted herself to a variety of causes affecting Ku-ring-gai. In particular Jean loved Ku-ring-gai's environment and architecture and spent many years protecting both.

In 1998, she accepted an invitation to join the Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment Committee, where she held the position of Minutes Secretary for a number of years. She remained an enthusiastic member of the Friends of Ku-ring-gai until her retirement in 2014. In 2003, Jean was awarded a Centenary Medal for service to the Ku-ring-gai community—honouring the tenacity with which she spoke out and the way she took action when passion stirred her.

Jean wrote many submissions on planning and environmental issues affecting Ku-ring-gai and also wrote regular letters to local newspapers to bring them to the attention of the wider community. Jean was also devoted to her family. Married for 61 years to Professor Sol Posen, she was a loving mother to Jennifer, James, Mark and Timothy and grandmother to her seven grandchildren.

My colleagues on Council will fondly remember Jean's wonderful sense of humour, for she was never afraid to have a laugh at her own expense. Jean lived a life devoted to speaking up for those causes she believed in and she served her community with unswerving dedication.

We acknowledge and thank Jean Posen for her tireless contribution to the Ku-ring-gai community and we express our sincere condolences to her family.'
Ku-ring-gai Council Minutes, Ordinary Meeting Council 7.2.17

The *North Shore Times* also printed a wonderful tribute to Jean Posen.

FOKE was so fortunate to have had Jean's membership, friendship, and unfailing dedication to work as a committee member over 16 years. She will always be fondly remembered for

her gregarious and loving nature and for her tireless work to preserve and protect Ku-ring-gai.

• FOKE COMMITTEE

FOKE is very fortunate to have a team of enthusiastic and dedicated committee members, each contributing much time and energy in various ways over the past year.

I wish to thank – Ursula Bonzol, Carolyn Darby, Janet Harwood, Denise Hendy, Janine Kitson, Katrina Pickles, Kerrie Piper, Dinah Warner and Tanya Wood for their work on the committee. 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 mailings to our members.

Special thanks go to Ursula Bonzol and Janine Kitson who arrange *FOKE Talk*, organising the contributors' articles and editing the newsletter ready for print. Also to Katrina Pickles, our Minute Secretary, who does a great job in methodically recording every meeting. Thanks also to Dinah Warner, our Treasurer for the past four years, who has now handed over the reins to Kerrie Piper in 2017.

I would also like to congratulate Janine Kitson on her recent nomination and awarding of the 2016 Allen and Beryl Strom Award by The National Parks Association of NSW (NPA). Janine is a most deserving person of the award, which is given to a member of the NPA who has made outstanding conservation efforts and generated outcomes that benefit both the wider community and the NPA.

Congratulations are also in order for committee member Janet Harwood, who was awarded the 2016 Lions Club Award for her dedication and commitment to the environment. Janet has worked tirelessly in researching and campaigning for the protection of local wildlife, the heritage of Turramurra and the Sheldon Forest.

Thanks abound to Wendy Bishop, who kindly continues to draw cartoons that feature in our newsletters and on our Facebook page to dramatise the various planning issues we have highlighted.

And, to our very loyal and supportive membership - a huge thank you for your encouragement, kind words of support and your generous yearly donations that enable us to continue our work. Your ongoing membership is greatly appreciated and valued.

We are now midway of the 22nd year since FOKE started. Maintaining a strong membership remains a challenge for FOKE when so many of our members are retiring, moving out of the area or have unfortunately passed on. Please encourage new members to join FOKE so we remain a viable, relevant community group for years to come.

There is still the awful reality that 110 years of Ku-ring-gai history as a Municipality may be brought to an end by the Berejiklian Government. The Premier, despite the Court of Appeals win by Ku-ring-gai Council in March, is still talking about merging Ku-ring-gai with the Hornsby Shire. This State Government threat is of serious concern not only to Council but also for the future of FOKE and other community groups within Ku-ring-gai.

We need your help and assistance to lobby our parliamentarians to stop the amalgamation from happening so that we remain a stand-alone council for another 100 years to come.

FINALLY...

We thank Ku-ring-gai Council and, in particular, former Mayor Cheryl Szatow and councillors Berlioz, Armstrong, Malicki and McDonald for the strong and determined stance they took against the merger with Hornsby and for their resistance to the attempt by five Liberal-faction councillors to rescind the Appeal. We are concerned that if amalgamation is forced on Ku-ring-gai this year, not only will Ku-ring-gai citizens have reduced representation of just six councillors to nine Hornsby councillors but that also, under the new regime, only political party endorsed candidates with the backing of large donations will be successful in getting elected. That is, community independents who do not have the backing of party political machines will have little chance of election to a new council.

The proposed mega-council mergers, if implemented by the State Government in Metropolitan Sydney, will reduce communities' local voice and representation. Decisions about developments in Ku-ring-gai will be made by 'party politicians' from far away with no connection to the local area and who are unlikely to share the same values that define our local area. This has already been evidenced in a number of merged councils across the state where State Government appointed Administrators have been shown to put party policy above local issues.

Please use the upcoming local government elections in September 2017 and the State Government elections in 2018 to take a stand for local democracy and support candidates who are opposed to forced amalgamation and genuinely committed to protecting our local area rather than personal party political ambition.

Sydney Morning Herald journalist Elizabeth Farrelly, whose passion and frustration is oft expressed at the current government, wrote in July 2016:

'Three years hence, when we can finally kick this rapacious government from office, I'll be surprised if anything lovely is left. We'll have skyscrapers, motorways and mines. If anything beautiful remains it'll be because they haven't got around to wrecking it yet. The brutal truth; we're trashing Sydney's heritage.'

The FOKE committee, irrespective of which politicians are in power, will continue to work towards our aims and objectives to protect and enhance Ku-ring-gai's environment. FOKE will work hard on behalf of its members to do what we can to save Ku-ring-gai Council from amalgamation and elimination. We look forward to welcoming you to our 23rd AGM and Public Meeting in 2018.

Kathy Cowley
PRESIDENT