

FOKE Talk

Minister Stokes, a pandemic inspired opportunity for a better NSW!

NSW Planning is going forward with plans for high rise and high density in Sydney when all the facts suggest that the Covid-19 epidemic has changed the way people will live and work in Sydney.

Will this be our last pandemic? Most likely not. This one may take years to get fully under some sort of control or it may rear its ugly head again and again. With increasing globalisation and increasing global populations, more pandemics are a probability, not a possibility. There have been warnings 'spanning multiple decades' of such an event. (*ABC Science, The next pandemic is coming – and sooner than we think 7/6/2020*)

The facts of this pandemic highlight the importance of social distancing and self-isolation in reducing its severity and reducing the death toll. Essential to this is avoiding congested areas, whether in residences or employment locations, such as elevators, communal areas, and enclosed spaces such as public transport. Also essential is the need for fresh air, filtration from trees and separation.

High density buildings have characteristics that make social distancing virtually impossible. For example New York has experienced a disproportionately higher infection rate due to its very high density residential and employment situation.

If NSW planning continues to pur-



sue a high rise and high density strategy, it is abrogating its duty of care in building a healthy city for its citizens. One of the reasons that Australia has been able to manage the pandemic so well so far, is that our housing is still dominated by detached or low rise dwellings, and low-mid rise apartment buildings.

We have experienced a move to a more mobile workforce in just 3 months than we could have thought possible. The remote working model was anticipated to take many years to be embraced by businesses and employees alike. However this has now been tested and proven successful across a range of knowledge based industries. Employees determining that it is workable, and companies seeing the benefits of lower ongoing occupancy costs in the city.

Added to this is the report published in June on 'Population

Mobility in Australia from 2011 to 2016' by the Regional Australian Institute, which shows that for Sydney nearly 65,000 more people moved to the regions than came to Sydney. And significantly, more millennials, 20 to 35 year olds, are leaving Sydney for the regions than the other way around. One can only expect that this trend will strengthen with remote working opportunities increasingly more commonplace.

It is becoming clear that the Covid-19 impact will last for a number of years with consequent high unemployment and minimal immigration. The current models based on earlier assumptions of high population growth over the next 5 years are no longer valid.

There would be few businesses that would apply a pre-Covid business strategy as the basis of their future plans. Neither should NSW Planning!

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members

We are all living in challenging times following the outbreak early this year of the world wide pandemic COVID -19. Not only have we had to adjust our daily activities and family life to manage the impacts of the Pandemic but also how we manage our communication and the way we carry out FOKE business.

Whilst the virus restrictions are slowly being lifted now to allow more normal life to resume, there are still issues that organisations such as FOKE need to take into consideration. The committee is in the process of deciding when to hold the 2020 AGM which we had to cancel in May due to lockdown restrictions. We received a 6 month extension to hold our AGM, until November, from NSW Department of Fair Trading.

We have also discovered with the outbreak of the virus the implications and restrictions in holding regular committee meetings. FOKE 's Constitution currently does not permit the committee to use electronic means to conduct its business so our meetings, whilst being conducted by ZOOM, cannot be ratified until we meet in person. As such we have updated and amended our Constitution to include electronic means of conducting and formalising FOKE business.

At our AGM later this year, we will be asking members to adopt some new clauses to our Constitution to allow for these amendments. We are attaching a letter outlining and explaining these constitutional amendments, which reflect similar 'model constitution' changes from the Department of Fair Trading. Please refer to the current FOKE Constitution posted on the

FOKE website home page www.foke.org.au for your information in assessing these changes.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of prominent conservationist, environmentalist and union leader Dr Jack Munday AO and have written to his wife Judy expressing our sympathy and sincere condolences. Ann Carroll and I looked to Jack for inspiration and guidance when FOKE was first formed and enjoyed an afternoon tea with him in his home in 1995 talking about his activism and work to Save the Rocks.

Jack was a mentor and supporter to so many community groups who are fighting to save their heritage and environment. FOKE received a letter of support from Jack Munday in 2009 when Ku-ring-gai Council's planning powers were taken over by Planning Minister Frank Sartor. He wrote "*Successive State Governments have treated Ku-ring-gai people with contempt. Until an elected Council assumes control of the Planning process, abuse of planning powers will continue.*"

We are still waiting the outcome of submissions to the Draft Housing Strategy. We copied the FOKE submission to local State and Federal MPs, Mayor and councillors. The Hon Jonathan O'Dea MP sent this response to FOKE in reply "*I couldn't secure an extension for submissions from Ku-ring-gai Council, but have also lodged a brief submission myself expressing concerns.*"

In June FOKE also made a submission on the review of the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 detailing the importance of increasing its conservation powers.

The committee is happy to announce that Council will be supporting our request to have a memorial

tree planted in memory of member and outstanding community volunteer the late Phillip Langley. An Angophora Costata will be planted in the Gordon Recreational Park, a place where Phillip spent time playing tennis over many years. The park lost a number of trees with the devastating storm that impacted several Ku-ring-gai suburbs last year.

We will keep you informed of the date for the AGM as it is arranged. In the interim our best wishes to you for good health and resumption of a more normal family life.

Kind regards

Kathy Cowley

President

FRIENDS OF KU-RING-GAI ENVIRONMENT INC.

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COVID-19 – Our Absolute Disrespect for Nature

COVID-19 has happened because of our "absolute disrespect for nature and animals" argues famed conservationist Dr Jane Goodall. The pandemic reveals just how closely human health is connected to the health and resilience of the natural world.

Rampant exploitation and degradation of the natural world – that includes deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of housing, agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development have created a 'perfect storm' for the spill over of diseases from wildlife to people.

Human action now impacts on more than three quarters of the Earth's land surface, destroyed more than 85% of wetlands and dedicated more than a third of all land and almost 75% of available freshwater to crops and livestock production.

Legendary environmental pioneers David Suzuki and Vandana Shiva describe the virus as a "wake-up call" to restore the planet to health. We need to build a new

economy based on more sustainable and nature-enriching activities that restores the natural world and ends its biodiversity extinction crisis.

Yet governments persist in turbo charging economic growth based on extractive and environmental damaging industries such as construction, mining, logging and housing. These economic industries displace, destroy, degrade and obliterate natural habitats and ecosystems that wildlife are utterly dependent upon.

Renowned naturalist David Attenborough worries that the attention on the coronavirus is taking us away from action on the crisis on climate and in particular the rapidly warming Arctic and Antarctic ice caps.

The Australian environment is still in a parlous situation - the fire ravaged World Heritage forests, the Great Barrier Reef, the Murray-Darling River.

Australia has lost over 12 million hectares of national parks and

bushlands to the fires and 1 billion native animals have perished.

During the coronavirus lockdown many Ku-ring-gai sporting ovals, parks, playgrounds and streets and major roads, and even the Pacific Highway, became eerie places of quietness and emptiness. Fewer cars and planes allowed the song of birds and frogs to be heard. Less traffic allowed possums and even wallabies safety as they crossed roads and perhaps even allowed some to travel greater distances and find new homes. Less disturbance meant that birds roost and nest in places they normally might have avoided.

All this reinforces how Ku-ring-gai is a place of environmental splendour that needs even greater protection if we are to survive into the future.

A BETTER NSW

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What should NSW Planning do to develop a healthy environment for its citizens?

- Truly embrace decentralisation with more schools, high-quality health facilities and water security in the regions.
- Build schools and infrastructure to support the current population in outer Sydney.
- Immediately put a moratorium on high rise developments and assess the redeployment of released corporate space.
- Ensure the proposed green open space corridor guidelines are mandatory and not optional.



Update: Ku-ring-gai Housing Strategy

As Council failed to effectively publicise their Draft Housing Strategy to residents, FOKE distributed 4000 brochures to homes in the designated 800 metres increased density zone from a train station or transport hub in Lindfield, Gordon, Turramurra and St Ives prior to the close of the exhibition period on 8th May.

It is anticipated that the final Housing Strategy, with hopefully numerous amendments resulting from resident and stakeholder submissions, will be brought before Council this July or August. Much has changed for NSW and Australia since this draft Strategy was prepared earlier this year that needs to be taken into account. Specifically, that the influx of new residents into Ku-ring-gai will be much slower than anticipated as a result of closed borders and minimal immigration which will apply for up to 3 years, plus the benefits of remote working. This immediate and successful experiment in remote working for many industries will result in less pressure for homes closer to city centres.

The Draft Housing Strategy needs to embrace these changed circumstances as well as respond to the issues raised such as the overstated housing number by 2000, due to an unsupportable reduction in household size. The increased heights of 10, 15 and 20 storeys are completely contrary to community views.

There remains a lack of consideration in the strategy of the massive population increase already imposed on these town centres since 2006, and now targeting an unsustainable population growth of over 40% in only 30 years. And all without improvements in infrastructure, open space or community services.

Mayday for our Urban Forests

Ku-ring-gai is an LGA with endangered ecological communities in its reserves due to cascading environmental damage caused by individual zoning assessments.

Each zoning and each development is assessed on its individual impact, while the un-assessed cumulative impact of zoning for development quickly turns an environmentally sensitive area (ESA) into a construction zone.

Trees prevent development construction and their absence facilitates development. At zoning stages trees fall sick and die mysteriously and can be removed. Control of trees by local councils is lost. The situation is made much worse by State Government's careless 10/50 code.

As the cumulative impacts of zoning increase, trees are removed at a growing pace.

It almost certainly means that we will not have rare Urban Forest in the future, unless urgent steps are taken in Planning legislation to consider critical habitat and cumulative impacts.

Individual properties acquired for development during and after the rezoning process lead to demolition by neglect. As newer residents replace older ones "landscape amnesia" take over. Wildlife populations plummet and without habitat, extinction becomes the norm.

Saplings replanted after development in remaining soils, cannot replace food or habitat provided by mature trees. Foliage, branches and hollows of mature trees in an Urban Forest are lost at an increasing rate. Replanting is not as successful as it should be.

In this way, ecologically un-informed decision making, quickly undermines efforts to protect and restore biodiversity. The once rich Urban Forest becomes an urban myth.

Environmental zoning of rare remnants of Urban Forest for strong protection as corridors is a planning must.



Clover Moore and Jack Munday
CREDIT: JESSICA HROMAS

Vale Jack Munday AO (1929-2020)

Sadly, legendary unionist, environmental pioneer passed away in May, aged 90.

FOKE says "Thank you Jack Munday" for standing with us, and supporting us in protecting Ku-ring-gai's built and natural heritage. Jack Munday also was pivotal in supporting the campaign to protect the heritage of Gordon Railway Station in 2004.

Jack Munday is best known for instigating the world's first 'Green Bans' in the 1970s that saved so much of Sydney's inner city heritage and bushland foreshore from being bulldozed for high rise, by leading union strikes.

Jack understood that when the enlightened working class and middle class come together they could achieve social and environmental justice against unconstrained overdevelopment.

In 2020, we are in a much more dangerous age of environment and heritage destruction.

Everything Jack Munday the environmental hero symbolizes, is still critical to protecting NSW's heritage and its nationally significant, environmentally sensitive areas.

The NSW Government will be holding a State Funeral to commemorate Jack's legacy to the state.

Join FOKE Now!

Call or email us or join online
at www.foke.org.au