

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Presented at the Urban Bushland Council's Annual General meeting on **4 March 2003**

Achievements of the UBC from 5 March 2002 to 4 March 2003 according to our goals as stated on our Membership Form:

- **Local action and networking**

The UBC invited speakers representing different organizations and scientific institutions to monthly meetings. The speakers talked on a variety of issues that concerned our members. In April, Robert Powell gave an educational presentation on the nature of Tuart trees. Then Carla Miles and Andrew del Marco from the WALGA's Perth Biodiversity Project (PBP) gave an overview of the PBP and the funding program. This was very useful as some UBC members applied for the funding that is designed to build capacity within local governments to protect biodiversity within their municipalities. Later during the year, Executive members and our new Project officer met with PBP officers to discuss the results of their survey of local governments and potentials for projects to increase involvement of local governments in protection of urban bushland.

In June, John Dell discussed the great diversity of birds on the Swan Coastal Plain emphasizing the need for a lot more research to be done in this area. Another area with limited data availability is fungi. Kevn Griffiths spoke about the role of fungi in ecosystems at our July meeting. Then Anthea Paino gave a presentation on the frog watch program run by the WA Museum. 'The Effect of Drawdown of Water on Banksia woodlands' was a theme of Ray Froend's talk. This was aptly followed by a presentation by Vic Semeniuk on the effects of climate change on wetlands including a forecast for the next 20, 50 and 250 years. In November, Kirsten Tullis presented the results of a two year flora survey covering the areas of Bennett Brook, Henley Brook, St. Leonard's Creek and Wandoo Creek Catchments. Finally, in February Phil Jennings gave a very interesting talk on the history of conservation movement in Perth and the involvement of Main Roads in many battles to save remnant vegetation in Perth.

Former FESA Environment Officer, Jeff Mustard attended most of the UBC meetings and we hope that Jenny Abbott, the new Environment Officer will be able to continue this tradition. The UBC Executives also met with other representatives from FESA in preparation of our workshop Burning Issues.

Burning Issues workshop, run in November 2002, was a successful event that brought together many urban bushland managers, FESA representatives and Friends Groups to discuss fire management on the Swan Coastal Plain. The UBC's 'no prescribed burning' policy, and the need to increase weed control and post fire management in urban bushland areas was supported by speakers. Proceedings of the workshop were available soon after the workshop.

Members of the UBC Executive Committee are representing the group on advisory committees of several organizations. Mary Gray works with the Bush Forever

Advisory Group and Rob Greenwood with the Natural Diversity Working Group at the Swan Catchment Centre. Mary Gray, David Wake and Renata Zelinova attended meetings of the Working Group that was set up by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage to negotiate a solution for Burns Beach bushland. Unfortunately, we are disappointed with the outcomes from the meetings and expressed our concerns about the whole process in a letter to several ministers.

I attended many meetings of the Environmental Weeds Action Network and the Tuart Response Group. I was asked to arrange guest speakers for the TRG public meetings that talked about experiences of community groups with conservation of Tuart communities. Phylis Robertson, David Pike and I gave presentations. I felt greatly honoured to be asked by Bronwen Keighery to launch the Wildflower Society of WA (Perth Branch) book, *Tuart and Tuart Communities*.

The UBC office was unattended for the first half of the year because our funding was cut out. Neil Goldsborough volunteered to attend the office for half a day a week and help with the administration. He has done a good job keeping our correspondence in order. Other groups have noted his commitment for conservation this year too. Neil was awarded a Volunteer of the Year Award from CALM for his work at North Lake. Congratulations again Neil.

After waiting anxiously for 6 months, we were given a Community Grant from the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, enabling us to employ our new Project Officer Renata Zelinova. She was working part time and she has published four attractive newsletters, organized the Burning Issues workshop and proceedings, and generally coped with running the office.

- **Policy development**

The UBC Executives prepared submissions and encouraged Friends Groups to do the same on several important government strategies and new legislation released during the last year. One of the most important ones was the Environment Protection Amendment Bill 2002. Despite many positive changes that the new legislation will bring, the UBC expressed concerns that the new legislation will not stop clearing of remnant vegetation for urban development.

The UBC also prepared submissions on The State Sustainability Strategy and A Biodiversity Conservation Act for Western Australia Consultation Paper. A letter was also sent to the Department of Conservation and Land Management requesting that Tuart forest is listed as a Threatened Ecological Community. We have commented on a Local Environmental Strategy for the City of Wanneroo and management plans for some bushland areas including Woodman Point and several reserves in the City of Armadale.

- **Lobbying and Bush Forever**

The UBC Executive, Renata Zelinova, David Wake and Phylis Robertson attended regular six weekly meetings with the Minister for the Environment. Issues raised at those meetings included very slow implementation of Bush Forever, including the absence of the Urban Bushland Advisory Service after nearly 2 years since the

document has been adopted, important Bush Forever sites still under threat from development, such as Burns Beach and Underwood Avenue, lack of action for the implementation of the State Weed Plan. We sought the Ministers support for a forum of scientists to discuss the effects of climate change on remnant bushland and its implication for management.

Many of the above mentioned issues were also discussed on a meeting with Giz Watson MLA from the Greens (WA).

We have also written to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Minister for Local Government, the State Treasurer and the Premier expressing our concerns over several issues including State Weed Plan, implementation of Bush Forever and the increase of the Metropolitan Region Improvement Fund.

Several submissions and appeals were written on proposals affecting Bush Forever sites or local bushland areas.

We have applied for funds from the Commonwealth for an administration grant but were not successful in obtaining it. We have lobbied for support of our application for the Community Conservation Grant. We are still awaiting a decision.

- **Raising public awareness**

Several our members have raised issues concerning our groups through local newspapers. Olive Langham has arranged bush photos of Ken Hurst Park with Neil Goldsborough, Olive and me for the Melville Times and Fremantle Herald and we have been in contact with The West Australian. Committee member Rob Greenwood writes regular letters to the Southern Gazette. All our lobbying and letters also raise awareness of environmental issues for politicians and public servants.

Burning Issues workshop was a great public awareness raising activity. Over 80 participants included many public servants, a local government councilor and Friends Groups that are not affiliated with the UBC. An article about the outcomes of the workshop with several photos was sent to all local newspapers.

The Urban Bush Telegraph, our quarterly newsletter, has an important role in public awareness raising as it is distributed not only to UBC members. Our last issue was posted out to all Burning Issues workshop participants.

To conclude...

I have thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of being President of the Urban Bushland Council over the last two years and I regret that I am unable to continue due to having got osteoporosis and multiple myeloma (bone marrow cancer). However, I will continue to give support from home.

Being the boss has been fun as it was when I was a school principal. It has been a delight and a very great pleasure working with a small very friendly committee and the three project officers Isabella Jennings, Haakon Neilssen and Renata Zelinova.

Although I belong to about 35 organisations and groups and I have a very wide network with experience in administration and lobbying. I would have been lost and ineffective without the leadership of Mary Gray with her intimate knowledge of government processes and her skill and energy to write clearly written letters and reports. Mary has been the leader who has encouraged the Urban Bushland Council to achieve so much over the 10 years we have been in existence.

Special thank you goes to Sjaan Hoetmer, our Treasurer, for doing an outstanding job in looking after our finances.

Thank you Sarah Blagrove for recording the minutes of our meetings and thank you Rob Greenwood for your regular articles raising awareness of environmental issues and contributions to our newsletter. Thank you to all Executive committee for this year attending many long meetings and supporting the UBC.

Special thank you goes to Phylis Robertson that helped us in many ways this year; she attended several meetings with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, helped with interviews for our new Project Officer, facilitated at the Burning Issues workshop and offered her beautiful photographs for our publicity.

Thank you also to David Wake, that came along to our meetings with the Minister. And finally, Thank you again to Neil Goldsborough for volunteering one half day a week to help out in the UBC office.

Finally, thank you to all Friends Groups for your continuous support of the UBC and I wish you all the best in your efforts to conserve our pressures heritage.

I regret that I am unable to attend tonight's meeting but I will continue to support UBC from home any way I can.

Andrew Thomson
President