



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Presented to the Annual General Meeting of the Urban Bushland Council WA Inc
Tuesday 2nd March 2004 By Mary Gray (Vice President)

This report of our achievements for the period January to December 2003 is structured according to the objects of the UBC in our constitution and as shown on our membership forms.

LOCAL ACTION AND NETWORKING

Council meetings

Regular council meetings on the first Tuesday of each month provided a forum for community groups to network, gain support of others, and gain new ideas, knowledge and information about a variety of topics. The contribution of the following guest speakers is gratefully acknowledged.

February	<i>Phil Jennings</i> Roads and urban bushland
March	AGM <i>Christine Rafferty</i> Kangaroo grazing and its effects on the environment
April	<i>Harry Bastow</i> Bush regeneration with Friends of Baigup
May	<i>Rena Stenhouse</i> Community participation in bushland management
June	<i>Sue Metcalf</i> Changes to NHT and Swan Catchment Council <i>Paddy Weaver</i> Population growth and its implications for the environment
July	<i>Ralph Smith & Jenny Abbott</i> New FESA wildfire prevention initiatives
August	<i>Natasha Hyde</i> Managing groundwater levels in Dept of Environment
September	<i>Bevan Carter</i> History of early Swan River colonisation
October	Clearing Forum panel of Government Officers
November	<i>Bruce Robinson</i> Oil depletion- a hopeful trend for urban bushland?
December	10 year celebration of UBC members: <i>Certificates of recognition</i> <i>Fran Logan MLA</i> Official announcement: <i>Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project</i>

At the October meeting we held a well attended forum on the new arrangements proposed for clearing. A panel of Government officers made brief presentations and then it was open question and discussion time. There never seems to be enough time for such debates however it was clearly expressed that the community remains disturbed that the Government has taken too long to introduce new clearing regulations and there are too many exemption categories. Exemptions for roadside 'maintenance' are a major community concern as are fire prevention issues, rural subdivisions, other infrastructure provisions, 'upzoned lands' etc

Our 2nd December 10th anniversary gathering was a great success and it was good to see people from groups who have been longterm UBC members but who don't normally attend monthly Council meetings. It is the contribution to conservation by all our groups and many others who provide the driving force for the little that the UBC does itself on their behalf. Community caring for bushland was celebrated on December 2nd and we commend this incredible work again this evening. Our current newsletter has more details about the evening.

In addition to the above we held two more 10 year anniversary events. The Quiz night in July held at the lovely facilities of the Mt Lawley Bowling Club was a roaring success with teams from many government agencies as well as Friends groups. It was good to see so many younger folk present showing their support of community groups. Such social events are morale boosters for conservationists.

The second event was the Bush to Beach walk held jointly to celebrate 10 years for Friends of Shenton bushland and the UBC. UBC members were heavily involved in the campaign to save Shenton bushland 10 years ago and it was one of the more dramatic success stories due to very creative efforts of the local community.

In our networking role UBC representatives attended many official functions over the year.

UBC members and our Project Officer have helped a number of new groups to get started. This may start with a call to our office or by a conversation at some community gathering. Having an office does provide a focal point for new contacts and Renata has been able to follow up a variety of enquiries and requests for assistance. Her comprehensive reports to the Executive of her work during the year show all the details.

Support for campaigns

The list of campaigns for the year was as long as ever. The UBC has given support and prepared submissions etc through Renata's work and work of Executive and other members from groups as follows.

- Burns Beach
- Underwood Avenue
- Perth Airport drainage works
- Perth Airport proposal for Woolworths warehouse and distribution centre
- Perth Airport- Abernethy /Tonkin Highway on-ramp PER
- Perth Airport- preliminary draft Master Plan
- Karrinup bushland - (sale by Water Corporation)
- Bushplan for peel region
- Fremantle Eastern By-pass
- Bunbury Region Scheme
- Kiara TAFE site
- Saving Tuart communities

Many articles on these sites have appeared giving details in our newsletter the *Urban Bush telegraph*

Perth Urban Bushland fungi project

A major activity for the year was the development of the Fungi project. We started by calling a 'working meeting' to develop a major project. Ideas included fungi and invertebrates. Renata in her role as Project officer put some thoughts together and then it all just started happening, An outline for 2 fungi projects came out of that first meeting in May. Rather than tell the whole story the ending is the best bit. On December 2nd the *Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project*, a UBC project in collaboration with the WA Naturalists' Club and in conjunction with the WA Herbarium, was officially announced funded by Lotterywest.

Special thanks must go to Renata for her work in getting this project initiated. It is my pleasure to present Renata this evening with the first Certificate under this project. Special thanks also to the Steering Group: Kim Sarti, Roz Hart, Mary Gray, Jane Bracken and John Luyer (and Renata too). Thank you also to all the folk who assisted and gave advice. In particular we acknowledge Dr Neville Marchant's support (WA Herbarium, CALM) and enthusiasm for our project. And most importantly the UBC wishes to recognise the support of Lotterywest in providing funding and in advising us in development of the project through the work of Fay Overhue.

This evening it is a special pleasure to introduce the three officers who will be working on the project: Neale Bougher- Mycologist, Roz Hart - Community Education Officer, and Jacqueline Keelan-Wake as Project Support Officer. Official start date is 2nd March 2004- today.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The UBC's role is to debate, develop, and promote policy for the protection and management of urban bushland.

Bush Forever

The UBC is the only community body represented on the Bush Forever Advisory Group. I attended quarterly meetings and field trips during the year. A number of bushland areas have been recommended for addition to Bush Forever and these will go through future major MRS Amendments. More areas are yet to be assessed. A draft *Statement of Planning Policy for urban bushland* was prepared and I made submissions on two iterations. The UBC has advocated an SPP for some years however it is slow in coming and lacks agency drive and political support. Perhaps more importantly a *major MRS Amendment for Bush Forever* including introduction of *Bush Forever Protection Areas* for all Bush Forever sites has been drafted and approved by the WAPC for advertising. This will be a major step forward as it will give some legal identity to Bush Forever conservation as a land use in its own right. It will also rezone a major proportion of sites for *Parks & Recreation Reservation* under the MRS. The UBC has continued to press for universal statutory protection for Bush Forever sites.

Dialogue

An unusual opportunity arose for UBC members to participate in the Government's *Dialogue with the City* held September 13th to determine what is wanted for Perth in 30 years time. We participated as a stakeholder group and others attended as community folk. What was most astounding was the overwhelming message from attendees was that they do not want any more green fields development, they do want Perth's open space and natural areas retained ie bushland, wetlands, foreshores, large existing parks and reserves. They have a vision quite different from current urban sprawl with consolidation in mid and inner suburbs around transport nodes. This has major implications for current patterns of galloping urban bushland clearing for low density sprawl.

Natural Diversity Working group

Rob Greenwood has represented the UBC on this group. A draft Regional Strategy was to be produced by the end of 2003 and it was. A special thank you to Rob.

Tuart Response Group

Andrew Thomson, Phylis Robertson and Renata Zelinova attended various meetings and workshops. A special thank you to all three.

Fire management. We have continued to press for improved fire management of bushland through FESA CALM and Local Government Authorities. Many groups work very hard at improving access, understanding and practice in fire prevention at sites by working with local government and agencies. Renata has continued to work in this area as much as possible.

LOBBYING

The UBC's role is to provide an avenue for lobbying by letter writing, submissions, delegations and media contact in seeking legislative change for bushland protection. In seeking improved protection of bushland during the year, we continued to focus on five key issues: *Bush Forever, clearing, local bushland* especially via the Perth Biodiversity Project, *fire management, and new biodiversity legislation*.

This involved numerous letters, submissions, meetings with Ministers, the EPA, the Appeals Convenor, and government officers in many agencies, and media releases. Executive committee members only did some of this work. Much is carried out by representatives from member groups who are backed up in their work by consistent support from our Project Officer Renata. I wish to acknowledge all the work done by all these people, remembering that it is the expertise and passion of members of community groups which is the force of our network we call the UBC.

Our calls for increased priority to be given to Bush Forever implementation seem to have fallen on deaf ears in government. We acknowledge however that Bush Forever is being implemented slowly but surely and we express our firm support for Bush Forever at every opportunity. This is a message we must all continue to keep

on the boil as it is a 10 year implementation program. Bush Forever sites are being purchased by Government via the Metropolitan Region Improvement Fund and officers of DPI indicate to us that around \$25 million had been spent to the end of 2003. Lists of sites acquired appear in our newsletter at times.

We expressed our deep concern at the rash of countless proposals for clearing of good quality bushland on the urban fringe and in the south west. Many appeals were lodged with the Minister for the Environment's Appeals Convenor @ \$10 each. Too many proposals in significant bushland were listed by the EPA as '*not assessed*' others had inadequate assessments.

Appeals included:

- In the northern suburbs a cluster at: Lots 12 Marmion Ave, Lots 17, 18, 22 Clarkson Avenue Wanneroo (all separate appeals @\$10)
- two sites (2 appeals) for drilling south of Geraldton
- Lot 502 Bibra Lake
- a cluster in quality Tuart communities on the southern Swan Coastal Plain at Lot 2 Dawesville, College Grove Bunbury, Gum Nut Avenue Dawesville
- EPA Bulletin 1099 May 2003 for the assessment of Underwood Avenue bushland (Bush Forever site)
- a subdivision at Gidgeganup

Amendments to the Environmental Protection Act which include provisions for new clearing controls finally completed its path through State parliament in 2003. However the new clearing regulations are not yet finalised as the Government continues to procrastinate with endless consultations and slow processes. We have lobbied officers and the Minister for the Environment to include at the very least a comprehensive, transparent process for data collection for *all clearing whether approved, rejected or exempt*. There is no proper assessment of how much bushland is being cleared because there is no comprehensive data collected. We can all see the bulldozers out there and panic clearing before new controls is evident. Subdivision and development is occurring at a very rapid rate in the south west and this is in our internationally recognised biodiversity hot spot. The UBC has lobbied consistently for new regulations to control *all urban clearing* but that will not happen. It is expected that much urban clearing will come within the 'exempt' class or will be let through by the EPA as 'not assessed' as was the case for 2003.

Perth Biodiversity project: local bushland

We strongly support the PBP and their excellent Biodiversity Planning Guidelines. We lobbied both the Minister for Planning & Infrastructure and Minister for the Environment for mandatory introduction of the planning guidelines as part of Bush Forever implementation. Their response has been 'weak' to date. Some Councils have however been using the new framework and the PBP has inspired positive movement by some Councils. PBP grants have enabled some surveys to commence. The UBC feels that the PBP Planning Guidelines need ongoing support from the community to press Councils for their use. The UBC itself can only do so much, the drive must keep coming from the community.

Fire management

As discussed in other sections we have continued to press for improved fire management, a better understanding of bushland by fire agencies and a sea change in community education at local levels to improve 'fire readiness' in fire prone semi rural and other areas. This is a perennial issue but it needs much greater dedicated resources. Renata attended a workshop at Gingin to help the community and fire authorities prepare for and prevent fire. She has also helped us greatly in maintaining a good working relationship with FESA. Jenny Abbott and Ralph Smith attended some Council meetings.

I also attended a seminar '*Bushfires and Cities*' organised through UWA and the new CRC for Bushfire Prevention. Len Foster gave an excellent presentation and a summary of his talk was presented in the Urban Bush Telegraph during the year.

New Biodiversity legislation

The UBC has advocated inclusion of statutory protection of Bush Forever sites (and regionally significant bushland for other areas) in the new legislation. In addition we have advocated, in discussion with the Minister, for inclusion of provisions for local Biodiversity Plans and protection of locally significant bushland. We expressed grave concerns at a workshop organised by the Conservation Council about new trends in allowing 'conservation offsets' for significant bushland. The UBC continues to advocate against such trends which have no scientific or proven basis. There is no Biodiversity Bill yet.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

The UBC's role is to raise awareness of the values and problems facing urban bushland. Many activities already mentioned fit this objective also so they won't be repeated again here. Raising awareness occurs at three levels: firstly within our own network of community groups, secondly within the government sector, thirdly within the general public.

Getting our message through to the public is generally through the local press and most of this happens through member groups, some of whom have achieved consistent publicity for their campaigns which is commendable. Getting media coverage in the West Australian Newspaper is difficult or usually impossible. Our biggest challenge has been for sites like Perth Airport and we did succeed in getting an article into the Sunday Times as well as twice in local papers. However the people of Perth are blissfully unaware of the shocking events in conservation lands at the Airport and the State Government has been remarkably silent. We believe the clearing and what is proposed for the Airport is a public scandal, the complicit silence of the State Government being as shocking as the actions of the Commonwealth in approving destruction contrary to their own heritage listing.

Mary Gray represented the UBC as a *voice for the bush* at a panel session on 'partnerships' at the Sustainability Conference held in Fremantle. My focus was on clearing of urban bushland and the lack of adequate controls.

THE UBC 2003

Executive Committee members

Mary Gray (Vice President and Chair), Sjaan Hoetmer Treasurer, Jessica Bayens Secretary (part of year) Margaret Owen Secretary (part of year), Phylis Robertson, Rob Greenwood, Andrew Thomson, Kim Sarti (part of year), Robyn Murphy (part of year)

Office Volunteers

Neil Goldsborough, Robyn McElroy

Fungi Steering Group

Kim Sarti, Mary Gray, Renata Zelinova, Roz Hart, John Luyer, Jane Bracken

Project Officer: Renata Zelinova