



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Presented to the Annual General Meeting of the Urban Bushland Council WA Inc
Tuesday 1st March 2005 By Mary Gray (President)

This report is for the period January to December 2004.

As usual we held Council meetings on the first Tuesday of each month with guest speakers. Attendance was variable depending on the interest in speakers and their topics. These gatherings are always useful for networking, mutual support amongst members, hearing what is actually happening at the grass roots level with groups and keeping in touch with helpful officers in state agencies. We wish to acknowledge the continuing stream of good scientific and other advice we receive from many officers in lots of agencies.

We were hampered in our general program for the year by our very limited funds to employ a Project Officer. Our Community Conservation Grant was half that of previous years but we were committed to keep our Office open as part of the Fungi project. So all we could do was employ Renata on a couple of specific projects and produce our quarterly newsletter *The Urban Bush Telegraph*. Our volunteer network and Executive Committee did the rest.

Nevertheless the UBC conducted some major activities:

1. The Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project is a collaborative project between the UBC and the WA Naturalists' Club, with the WA Herbarium, and is fully funded by Lotterywest for phase 1 (18 months). Phase 1 started in March 2004 and is due for completion 31st August 2005 at which time a report of the project's achievement will be produced against the projected milestones.

This is a very large and bold project for the UBC expected to last at least 5 years. I am pleased to report that it is going very well and has exceeded expectations and plans in a number of ways. Being able to capture the services of an accomplished senior research scientist from CSIRO is more than most community organisations or the WA Herbarium could ever dream of. The result has been a rapid injection of the long neglected field of mycology into the WA Herbarium and the transfer of CSIRO's fungi collection to the State Herbarium, a very special bonus triggered by our project. Neale Bougher, Mycologist, Roz Hart, Community Education Officer, and Jacqueline Keelan-Wake, Project Support Officer, as employees under the project report regularly to the Project Management Committee and we acknowledge their excellent work. Full details of progress are available to any members who wish to go into our office to view records.

The UBC Executive has decided to apply to the federal government for 'Gift recipient status' under the Taxation Act. The potential for attracting new sources of funds via such status has come to our attention for the fungi project and it has potential also to attract increased donations to support our campaigns and Project Officer employment.

To give a little insight into achievements for the 2004 fungi season, 847 specimens were collected and processed in the lab from 14 bushland areas involving over 600 enthusiastic volunteers. 130 fungi voucher specimens have been lodged in the WA Herbarium and a fungi database has been built. Neale and Roz have made scores of presentations to community groups and agencies.

The project includes a major community volunteer component in field forays and surveys as well as regular Herbarium work. The UBC wishes to thank sincerely all those dedicated volunteers who have made this project really tick. I also wish to sincerely thank my willing and industrious colleagues of the Management Committee: Kim Sarti, John Luyer, and Neville Marchant, together with supporting staff from the Herbarium

Beryl Crane and Nick Landers. The WA Herbarium staff have been real champions of this collaborative project and we appreciate their enthusiasm and friendliness to everyone involved.

2. Bush Forever

We have continued our pressure on a half-hearted government in its implementation of Bush Forever. We have been active on the Bush Forever Advisory Group (BFAG) which had its final meeting in December. BFAG has at least recommended a series of areas for addition to Bush Forever. However we are shut out of the process of '*Negotiated Planning Solutions*' and we continue to advocate for implementing *all* the land in each Bush Forever site and more funding to acquire those 'difficult' or 'expensive' sites.

After 7 years a disappointing decision was finally made for Burns Beach - and 50% will be lost. Underwood Ave has had a temporary reprieve but we are suspicious of UWA's intentions and government weakness likely in 2005. A team of local government authorities can't wait to play the land development game and destroy the Mindarie site. Joondalup can't keep its dollar eyes off site 325 Ocean Reef and Stirling is indulging in double standards at its Mirrabooka site. On the eastern side of the Swan Coastal Plain site 125 and others in Southern River and sites in Gosnells are sadly being reduced cut and wrecked by a weak government complicit with land developers interests above conservation.

The UBC has been advocating statutory protection for urban bushland since we formed. This year the Government released long awaited proposals for *Bush Forever Protection Areas* to be placed over all Bush Forever sites and a draft Statement of Planning Policy for bushland. Renata prepared a joint submission for the UBC and Conservation Council (kindly funded by CCWA). This was a major piece of work and we seek some important improvements to the proposals.

The whole issue of provision for management of sites has not received the attention or funds it deserves. Management provisions must be added to the MRS text Amendment. The SPP needs substantial revision and must be made legally binding. Agency half heartedness and lack of co-operation that we see is unacceptable to us and to the long term health of our unique bushland. Bush Forever is a massive public investment and it must be maintained.

3. Perth Airport

This has been our big campaign for the year. We started the year by lodging an appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) to test whether there was an avenue of appeal against the Commonwealth Government's approval of clearing for the Woolworths' Distribution Centre. Special thanks to Renata for all her work on this. Also a 'thank you' to Rob Greenwood for his tireless support and work, and to Steve Walker who presented our case pro bono. Our case failed, and this means there are no appeal rights under the Airports Act.

We placed paid advertisements in the local press to raise at least some public awareness of destruction at the Airport. An outcome was that Westralia Airports Corporation WAC started to talk to us and the State, and established an Environmental Advisory Committee which has met. They reluctantly attended our Seminar "*Wetlands to Wastelands*" and were called to account for their disregard for conservation and public input. The proceedings are on our web site, thanks to Renata. Kevin McLean has made a major contribution with his submissions and knowledge, especially with the Master Plan. The Master Plan spells doom for much of the Airport's wetland and bushland heritage but we will not give up because the site is so significant and large.

The UBC is calling for excision of the ~700 ha heritage bushland from the Airport lease so that it may be protected and managed as a conservation reserve of national significance. We also call for the establishment of a *Foothills Regional Conservation Park* to link the Airport- Brixton St wetlands- Hartfield Park etc to retain and manage the little but rich biodiversity of this region before it is too late.

4. Beckley bushland

A vigorous campaign by the Friends has used all avenues for gathering site information, making appeals, pleas and submissions. A 4ha site with 26 sp orchids, ancient Marri trees and an intact understorey in good condition tucked away beside a freeway could not be found in any other city of the world. Disregard for the

values of this site is a reflection of the attitude of New Metro Rail and the Government all along the SW railway.

Other activities

Swan Regional Strategy

Rob Greenwood has continued our thankless involvement in the Diversity Working Group and we made a major submission on the draft Regional Strategy. However we despair that the process has confounded itself in a tortuous new large bureaucracy and has lost site of our region's biodiversity hotspot status and the need to protect it.

Lake Karrinyup Country Club

With so much local opposition to a proposal for housing in the buffer zone of the Lake, identified as a site with Acid Sulfate Soils we convened a public meeting. The UBC also made persistent appeals to both Stirling Council, WAPC and DOE as both had flawed processes and gave erroneous advice.

More: Many other submissions were made including Acid Sulfate Soils, Kewdale Freight Terminal, Kewdale-Hazelmere Master Plan, MRS Amendments, and clearing appeals. The new clearing regulations are no step forward for urban bushland, and far too much clearing of good bush continues.

Member involvement at the 'big picture' level

We wish to acknowledge the outstanding selfless commitment made by many members on consultative committees. Many sit on LGA Environmental Advisory Committees and apply persistent pressure for institutional reform to put bushland issues in council agendas and budgets as new priorities. This is hard work against a tide of inertia and ignorance in Councils.

Another example: Eddy Wajon, Jan King, Jeff Anderton, Judy Trembath, Shirley Joiner, Tony Passchier, and Richard Smith, sat on a Consultative Committee for the south west metro Rail project for the past 3 years. It seems that little of their advice has been used and the PTA was reluctant to consider alternatives. This is poor planning and bushland conservation is relegated to the last priority.

In concluding I wish to thank all the Executive Committee members for their unflagging commitment to bushland conservation and their support to me. There are many other members who have helped in many ways. Neale, Roz, Jac and Renata: you have all contributed so much to the UBC. 'Thank you' one and all. Sadly we said 'farewell' to Andrew Thomson who died in August. We miss him, but we will not forget his contribution to the UBC, the bushland south of the River and to us personally. The Waterford Reserve- his favourite- is to be named after him.

Mary Gray

1st March 2005