

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE URBAN BUSHLAND COUNCIL WA INC
Tuesday 14th March 2006 7.30pm
Held at the Old Observatory 4 Havelock Street West Perth

This report is for the calendar year January to December 2005.

2005 was a very busy and productive year for the UBC. We had our usual monthly meetings with guest speakers, produced the newsletter, wrote many submissions, supported community groups in their campaigns, lobbied about Bush Forever, Perth Airport, the AK Reserve, and completed the first phase of our Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project with Lotterywest funding. Our novel end of year activity at Lowlands was a great success.

A Community Conservation Grant from the Minister for the Environment enabled us to maintain our office at 2 Delhi Street and to employ Renata Zelinova for just 12 hours per week over a 46 week period. On behalf of the Executive and all UBC members I wish to acknowledge Renata's outstanding contribution to conservation and to the UBC. She is very capable and is always willing to make an extra effort to produce quality work, but most importantly she is a real pleasure to work with.

Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project

The fungi foray season in 2005 was very productive thanks to good winter rains which started early and also a more experienced team of staff and volunteers. This was a contrast (weatherwise) to the dry year of 2004. Importantly people really enjoyed themselves communing with fungi in nature. We completed all milestones planned and dramatically exceeded some, way beyond our expectations.

Special acknowledgement is due to *all* team members who worked so well under the inspiration of Neale Bougher's scientific leadership. Neale's outstanding leadership was commended by the Minister for the Environment (Dr Judy Edwards) when she launched the project website www.fungiperth.org.au. A special thankyou to: Roz Hart (Community Education Officer) for your infectious enthusiasm in educating people about fungi and the project; to Jac Keelan-Wake in administration support and her essential attention to detail; to Rebecca Zappia for her dedication in data entry as a volunteer - and we were pleased to be able to pay her at the end of the project; to John Weaver voluntary webmaster extraordinaire; to Peter and Elaine Davison for your quiet persistent work; to all 12 fungi leaders; and last but not least the Project Management Committee: John Luyer, Peter Davison, Kim Sarti, Neville Marchant (WA Herbarium) who supported me as Chairman.

The UBC wishes to acknowledge our project partners: the WA Naturalists' Club and the staff of the WA Herbarium lead by Neville Marchant. Neville has been a very enthusiastic supporter of our project from the outset and we now wish him well in his retirement, but we shall miss his indelible support.

Neale will tell us some of the project findings in his talk and this evening we shall also be presenting the reports for each of the sites studied last year. A general report on phase one of the Fungi project has been prepared for Lotterywest and is available here tonight (or from our office) to anyone who would like a copy. This report was also presented in our nomination for the WA Environment Awards for 2005. We were thrilled to be a finalist and then to be awarded a 'Special Commendation' in the Whiteman Park Community Achievement Award. This Award belongs to all the community volunteers and project staff of PUBF.

Bush Forever

The UBC has continued to lobby for improved implementation of Bush Forever and particularly for the passage of the Metropolitan Region Scheme Amendment for Bush Forever. Implementation has now reached the 5 year half way mark and we still do not have this statutory amendment to the MRS in place – through '*Bush Forever Protection Areas*'. And we believe the expenditure of the \$100 million to secure sites is way behind. Words spoken in my report to last year's AGM still stand.

We are however slightly hopeful that our lobbying at the end of last year will help promote action by Government this year. UBC Member groups remain concerned that the whole issue of management of sites

is yet to be addressed and properly funded. Details of what the UBC is advocating are available from Renata in the office.

Acid sulphate soils (ASS)

The UBC has become very concerned about the lack of proper government response to acidification and intractable pollution of waterways and wetlands as a result of disturbance and aeration of areas with high acid sulphate soil risk. The sudden lowering of water tables on the Swan Coastal Plain has dramatically exposed many high risk sites. For example sites in the City of Stirling near Lake Gwelup are suffering extremely high arsenic levels, acidity and toxic levels of iron and probably other heavy metals.

The UBC made a number of submissions during 2005 on proposals for high risk sites, all of which were approved. This will be a very major issue in coming years. Wetlands on the Gnangara Mound are also affected. Restoration work at Baigup Reserve was contaminated.

CAMPAIGNS

Perth Airport

UBC protestations have continued to little or no avail. Two more major development plans (MDP) have been presented: (1) the Coles-Myer site having been cleared by WAC *before* the MDP process started. Another wetland destroyed and the community has no say.

(2) A huge local community campaign erupted over BGC's proposed brickworks in the West Aviat Golf Course site. Most public concern is about air pollution and WAC did not even acknowledge the threats to conservation precincts of fluoride and other emissions as 'key issues of community concern' in submissions.

Beckley Bushland

It is almost unbelievable that the melodramatic events surrounding the protesters' camp and final sit-in, arrests of protesters (one of whom was parked naked in a stormwater drain) and clearing of this site received no TV or 'West Australian' media coverage. Yet just last week we have seen a flurry of press over compensation payouts to residents 'for the sake of a flower' (the declared rare *Caladenia huegelii*). Appeals, submissions, the presence of 26 orchid species, and a 3 year consultation committee had no influence on the outcome (except for the addition of 1 Marri tree), the decision having been made years earlier on Commonwealth advice to retain only 0.8ha. It was not for the lack of trying by the Friends of Beckley Bushland, local residents and protesters with a huge presence on site over many weeks. The UBC acknowledges the huge community effort by the Friends to raise awareness of the issue.

Lake Karrinyup Country Club rezoning

Another drawn out decision-making process, replete with irregularities in advice by the DOE and by the City Of Stirling despite numerous appeals. A 'disallowance motion' - for the MRS Amendment to rezone to urban - was moved by Giz Watson in the Legislative Council on the last sitting day for 2005. The UBC is actively seeking support from the Liberals to support the disallowance. The matter will be decided by parliament in the next week.

Kewdale Freight Terminal (Public Transport Authority)

The appeal processes for this site continued in 2005. The Minister Dr Judy Edwards did not uphold our appeal nor accept our request for a s43 reassessment. We also appealed against the clearing permit and its conditions. We maintain there is a TEC on this site and that it should be protected and added to Bush Forever. However the site was never assessed by Botanists for TEC status before being assessed. (A TEC assessment has eventually occurred this month).

Protect Pt Peron PPP

A new group was launched at a press conference organised by the Conservation Council to campaign against the extraordinary canal and housing development proposed by Landcorp for much of the Pt Peron Bush Forever site. Acid sulphate soils are present too. We received some TV news coverage on Ch 7, 9 and 10. This is a stark example of the vacuum in Government policy and commitment to protect Bush Forever sites.

CONCLUSION

In concluding I wish to warmly thank all Executive Committee members for their dedicated work, their good humour and friendship, and wise guidance all year.

But most important of all are all the community groups who are doing the real work on the ground and with local authorities. Congratulations on your achievements and keep up your wonderful work. We are all here for the long haul to provide a voice for the bush and for future generations.

Mary Gray
14 March 2006