

Sutherland Shire
Environment Centre

Annual Report 2005-06

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre works in partnership with community and all levels of government to seek a sustainable environment in the Sutherland Shire and its bioregions.

It is a totally independent, non-government community organisation. It is an incorporated Association guided by a constitution and governed by a Board and Management Committee.



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Board and Management
Advisory Committee
Members
2005-06

Phil Smith (chair)
John Nelson (treasurer)
Elaine Lucas (secretary)
Ruth Zeibots
Neil deNett
John Lincoln
Genevieve Kelly
Michael McInerney

Development Officer
Graeme Booth

Chairman's Report 2006



Ewey Creek Catchment

Sustainability is not a spectator sport. Yet just watching from the sides or the back rather than participating up front or in the middle is what much of our culture and education unwittingly inculcates: *the expert is at the front of the room* in such things as schools, churches, governments and the footy. The history of the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre shows a deep understanding of the structures that encourage 'spectatorship' as well as what seems to be a general willingness in the community to 'just watch'. The Centre aims to help community members become players – actors not extras – in achieving sustainable change. It is a place that encourages and supports active participation in issues that matter: water, roads,

bush, climate, community well-being...

But sustainability is a new concept, a new frame of reference for humans. Until the middle of the 20th century, extinction was for other species. The realization that we can blow ourselves to kingdom come is only a relatively recent one, and we haven't adequately minimised *that* threat. Indeed, many argue we've made it worse! The realization that man-made systems, needs and processes are destroying the natural systems, needs and processes that sustain human existence is even more recent. And we have much to do if we are to reduce *this* threat. We certainly cannot afford to let it get worse, and the Centre will continue to play a role in making things better: lobbying, acting, planting,

talking, writing, participating, discussing... all very positive human activities that build rather than destroy. The brief summaries of action contained within this Annual Report give an indication of the Centre's successes. The membership-endorsed *Statement of Function* shows where the Centre will continue to be active in achieving a sustainable Shire and region.



Frogs are a sign of environmental health

Since the last AGM, the Centre's relocation has taken a great deal of time and energy; it has been our focus and the year has been one of consolidation and clarity. The move to a smaller, friendlier, street-front, table-centred shop signals a reiteration of the emphasis on people, on engaging the community and on working with 'others in the

community and in government to achieve a sustainable environment in the Sutherland Shire and its bio-regions.' Here, I need to thank those at the centre of this action: Graeme Booth, Ruth & John Zeibots, Gordon Hocking, John Levett.

Not all has changed, though. Still our volunteers turn up and contribute energy and joy. They give their time to helping the Centre thrive. I thank them enormously for being the solid force they are: Shirley Renshall, Ruth Turner, Elaine Lucas, Gordon & Elsa Hocking, Ruth & John Zeibots, Connie MacPherson, Jenni Gormley, Dave Shirley. Thank you.

Finally, it has been a joy working with the Board this year. Each member is blessed with a healthy measure of patience and creativity. Both were needed this past 12 months. Thanks to Neil deNett, John Nelson, Genevieve Kelly, Ruth Zeibots, Michael McInerney and John Lincoln. And, Graeme, thanks for keeping the door open and things ticking over!

Phil Smith

Treasurer's Report

For the 2005/2006 Financial Year the Centre reported a modest rise in income and a reduction in expenditure when compared to the previous year. As a result, the Centre produced a small operating surplus.

Operating Surplus

At 30 June 2006, the financial accounts of the Centre showed an operating surplus of \$11,251

compared to an operating deficit in the previous year of \$19,415.

Income

Total Income for the year was \$129,235 a slight increase when compared to the previous years amount of \$125,390.

Again, as in past years, we continue to operate financially with the generous donations of

individuals and organisations. It goes without saying that without such support the Centre could not afford to continue operating as effectively as it does. This year also saw the continued contribution from the Street Stalls and other Fund Raising activities. Our thanks to Ruth Zebots and her team of devoted volunteers.

Items of note within Income of the Centre included:

- decreases in Subscription Income and Donations Received;
- a decrease in Rent Received (as our Tenant moved out in December); and,
- increases in Grants received;

The loss of our tenant back in December and the associated loss of rental income placed additional financial pressure on the Centres operation. Upon receiving notice from the tenant, the Management Committee endorsed a proposal to seek an alternate tenant or the sale of either part or all of the Office. Graeme Booth was asked to run with this and pursue all options. Graeme, has done a great job in dealing with a myriad of estate agents, a small number of potential interested parties and a hoard of “tyre kickers” in a commercial / office market which currently is very tough. At this point in time however, we can report that agreements for the lease of all of the Merton St office are currently being drawn up.

Expenditure

Total Expenditure for the year of \$117,984 represents a decrease over the previous financial year of \$144,805.

Major areas of variation in expenditure over last year are seen in:

- Consulting Fees which are up when compared to prior year;

- Environmental Projects which show an increase in expenditure over prior year reflecting the fact that some Grant money received in prior year was spent this current year along with new Grants that were received this year. It should be noted that this does not include Wages and related costs associated with projects;
- Rent and Lease Preparation costs associated with the new Shop front Office;
- Superannuation and Wages were significantly lower when compared to the previous year.

Balance Sheet

Turning to the Balance Sheet, the property purchased in 2002 and its associated mortgage continue to dominate the Balance Sheet of the Centre.

Total monies held in bank accounts is approx. \$34,600 of which \$14,890 relates to grants, being earmarked for expenditure during the coming financial year.

Summary

As in past years, I have to report that the Centre continues to struggle in generating income. Again, a small band of committed supporters and the generosity of a key donor have ensured that major operating expenses of the Centre have been met.

The Management Committee have continued to closely monitor the Centre’s financial position and have sought opportunities to reduce existing expenditure and increase short and medium term income streams. In this regard, measures being taken in relation to leasing of the Merton Street premises will provide a net positive income stream over the life of this

lease. However, the Centre continues to encounter problems in generating significant ongoing income which would ensure the long term sustainability of the Centre. This must continue to remain one of our key areas of focus.

Special Mention

I would like to make special mention and extend my thanks to Shirley Renshall for her commitment and effort in

completing and tracking financial details on a weekly basis. Also, thanks are extended to Jennie Gormley and Graeme Booth for their work and assistance in closely managing expenditure and funds and to Bruce Spaul and Melina Lidis from the accounting firm Munro Spaul for their and their staffs time in auditing the accounts of the Centre.

John Nelson

Fundraising Report

The beginning of 2006 saw Stalls held at Gynea and Jannali which netted (??). Since moving into the Boyle Street premises we now sell books, plants and good saleable items from the shop. This has proved quite profitable with hopes to becoming more profitable!

In doing so, we have gathered a whole group of new friends and supporters of the Centre. People have commented 'Isn't this a great shop?' Why buy bromeliads at \$39.95 when you can pick them up for \$4 in Boyle Street? With the generous donations of our many supporters this enables us to offer

plants and goods at low, low prices. Mates rates was invented by us.

Our gratitude goes to Elsa and Gordon Hocking, Ruth Turner, Dave Shirley, John Zeibots and Connie MacPherson who conduct the Stalls for us. Keep the tills jangling - it is a main source of income for the Centre.

As well, many thanks to all those who have donated goods for resale by the Centre - keep it up we need that support to keep financially afloat.

Ruth Zeibots

Development Officers Report

Things have certainly moved along since last year and some major changes in direction have taken place. We are once again one of only two environment centres in New South Wales to operate from a shopfront -- we now have the opportunity to interact directly with the general public.

The Merton Street offices have been leased out for a five year period. This will enable us substantially reduce the mortgage taken out when the offices were originally purchased. If the lessee takes up the five year option after the initial five years, we will be able to satisfy the mortgage completely and the Centre's future income will be assured.



The new premises are still in a state of development: our goal is to create a resource hub where Centre members and the general public can access the tools and information they need to bring about behavioral change on environmental issues concerning the Sutherland Shire and its bioregions.



A new “Statement of Purpose” has been drafted to guide the future actions of the Centre’s employees and volunteers and use of its facilities. An action plan for the Centre’s activities will be compiled so that the effectiveness of future

activities can be reported and measured against the Statement of Purpose.

Our first action was to set up the Centre as a meeting place and as such is designed around a large meeting table. Keeping the Centre uncluttered means that the various community groups using it can feel comfortable and not as though they are “trespassing”.

Over the past year the Centre has worked with other groups in a number of ways:

- ❑ Nominated by Sutherland Shire Council as a recipient charity for the “Easy Being Green” project, resulting in over \$12,000 being received by the Centre.
- ❑ Worked with Council and a coalition of community group to successfully oppose the desalination plant proposed for Kurnell.
- ❑ Assisted in the production of Miranda Precinct & Progress Association’s Ewie Greek brochure.
- ❑ Worked with SharkBike to create a map of a low stress bicycle route from Sutherland to Cronulla.
- ❑ Worked with Council and the Kurnell community to submit a grant application for \$60,000 to protect endangered types of vegetation on the Kurnell peninsula.
- ❑ Working with SharkBike and CRoSS to campaign for a rail trail in conjunction with the duplication of the Cronulla – Sutherland railway line.

Graeme Booth

Volunteers

This past year has seen the same volunteers give of their time and energies as in previous years. Without them our organization would not be able to function.

During the transition from Merton Street premises to our current shopfront in Boyle Street they showed great patience with the move, which went with minimal disruption.

Elaine Lucas is our Tuesday volunteer with Shirley Renshall on

Thursday and Ruth Turner finishing the week off on Friday. They provide a clipping service to form an up-to-date library on current issues and happenings in the Shire and bio-regions which is made available to students, both primary and tertiary.

Our thanks go to them for such stirring work and support for the Environment Centre.

Ruth Zeibots

Projects and Campaigns

The Shire's north: Kurnell and Botany Bay

The Environment Centre has played a leading role in two major campaigns against State Government's wrong-headed move to impose damaging developments on Kurnell Peninsula and Botany Bay.



The proposed desalination plant was to release its waste into Botany Bay

A desalination megaplant at Kurnell?

When Premier Bob Carr made his infamous announcement – without any consultation with Shire council

or community – that the largest desalination plant in the world would be built on Kurnell Peninsula, next to the Oil Refinery, a storm of protest immediately broke out.

Council acted promptly: an outdoor public meeting, back of Wanda Beach, was called for 17 July 2005. Our Centre was asked to provide a speaker.

Though the meeting assembled only six days after Carr's announcement, a thousand angry residents attended.

Bob Walshe, the Centre's Patron, called for complete unity of the Shire in opposing what he called "a megaplant". Despite some bickering between the major political parties, unity was maintained in the campaign that followed.

Unity and determination succeeded in securing the postponement of the megaplant. While this was not a complete victory – the Government retains a 45 ha site and has

constructed a small experimental plant – the postponement has been hailed as a considerable achievement. Bob gave “10 reasons why Kurnell should not host the megaplant”:

- ❑ Kurnell Peninsula is sacred ground to Australia’s Aboriginal people;
- ❑ it is “first meeting place of Aboriginal and European cultures”;
- ❑ it is “the birthplace of modern Australia” (Phillip raised the flag there);
- ❑ it is dramatically historic as landfall for *Endeavour* and *First Fleet*;
- ❑ it was promised safeguards from development damage (3 Sept. 2002);
- ❑ it has 14 major environmental assets – threatened by this plant;
- ❑ its rich marine life, from whales down, will suffer from briny effluent;
- ❑ its steward, Sutherland Shire, is united in opposition to the proposal;
- ❑ its Shire’s 220,000 population is second largest LGA of 170 in NSW;
- ❑ the Shire already contributes greatly to Sydney’s water-saving through the Woronora Dam and Cronulla Sewage Treatment Plant.

Expansion of crowded Port Botany?

For two years the Centre has been in the forefront of a campaign to stop the State Government’s proposal to greatly expand Australia’s largest container port, Port Botany.

With 30 other community groups of the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance, BBaCA) the Centre has contributed strongly to the

Commission of Inquiry set up to examine all aspects of the proposal. But when Commissioner Kevin Cleland reported that the proposed expansion was greatly excessive, the government blatantly announced that the whole expansion would go ahead anyway. Blatant indeed!

BBaCA spokesperson Gary Blaschke declared, “We won the argument but have lost the war because Government has used naked power to get the result it mistakenly thought the independent Inquiry would deliver”. The result will be severe damage to Botany Bay’s struggling ecology and great traffic congestion in the Port/Airport/Alexandria /M5East area – not to mention a billion dollars needlessly wasted.

The campaign has not been abandoned. Currently BBaCA is pushing for last-ditch interviews with Premier Iemma and Treasurer Costa.

F6

The F6 campaign is ongoing. The community groups in the area are emphasizing the need to pursue public transport given recent increases in petrol prices and rates of greenhouse gas emissions.

The M6 Options paper is still officially awaited.

The campaign is being supported by Barry Collier MP for Miranda.

The Great Kai’Mia Way

All was progressing well with this project and a DA was lodged by Sutherland Shire Council staff to formalize the location of the Kai’Mia Way in the Sutherland Shire.

Unfortunately some complaints raised about access to the Way have rendered the DA unworkable and the DA has subsequently been withdrawn.

Walkabout Menai

The departure of our coordinator, Shani Archer, to concentrate on final year University studies led us to employ a staff member of Menai Community Resource Centre as the new coordinator. After discussions between the Environment Centre, Menai Community Centre, and the Department of Sport and Recreation agreement was reached for Menai Community Centre to take control of this project over its final two years.

The Community Centre is the hub of the Menai Community and as such is better placed to manage the ongoing coordination of this important project.

Active Transport

Over the past 12 months Sutherland Shire Environment Centre has continued to promote active transport (walking, cycling, use of public transport) as an healthier and more environmentally beneficial alternative to using private motor vehicles.

Together with the local Bicycle User Group (SharkBike), and with the assistance of a grant from Sutherland Shire Council, the Centre has produced a pocket size map of a low-stress bicycle route between Sutherland and Cronulla. 3000 copies have been printed and are steadily being distributed through the Shire through libraries, bike shops, and other places that have expressed an interest in doing so. The map has received a very

positive response and will hopefully lead to increased cycling in the Shire.



SharkBike members surveying the bicycle route between Sutherland and Cronulla

During the consultative stage of the State Government's plans for duplication of the Sutherland-Cronulla railway line, the Centre lodged submissions supporting the duplication and calling for a shared path to be constructed as part of the works.

The campaign for this path, in particular between Miranda and Caringbah, is progressing (again in conjunction with SharkBike and other community organisations, including many of the Chambers of Commerce who are aware of the superior contribution of cyclists and walkers to local economies). There is a lot of community support and we are hopeful of a positive outcome.



There is widespread support for a shared path along the Cronulla railway line

The Centre has also involved itself in 2 other campaigns related to cycling and walking: first, in its strong protest against the closure of the long-used railway access-way between Yarrawarra and Heathcote. A new firetrail has been constructed within the national park boundary which satisfies the recreational needs of mountain bike riders, but continues to ignore the needs of older residents and children who were in the habit of using this highly visible route along the railway line for both commuting and exercise.



The new fire trail includes some "significant" hills, but is a vast improvement

The Environment Centre strongly supports cyclists' call for a dedicated cycleway on the Princes Highway between Sutherland and Waterfall.

With the current generation of Australian children having the world highest rate of increase in obesity, active transport is one of the most important pro-active issues we can address. Incorporating activity into our own

and our family's daily life is widely acknowledged to be the most effective way to overcome this problem. Making active transport choices is also more appropriate for a world confronted with climate change and dwindling supplies of fossil fuels.

Writing Competition

This year we have conducted a "Writing about the Environment Competition" with the schools of the Shire.

Three schools have participated, Kurnell Primary, St Catherines Gynea and Heathcote High.

Helen Armstrong of Bundeena has been kind enough to do the judging, being very experienced in short story writing and judging of such contests.

At the time of writing the competition was not finalised, but I believe we will have a representation of the winners, with their work, at our AGM.

Our hope is to publish a collection of the works submitted for distribution through Shire outlets and the Centre's shop. To hear what the children of our Shire think about issues affecting their local environment is vital for the healthy sustainability of our Sutherland Shire.

After all, theirs is the future.