



CUTS IN WATER EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS

SMH [24th Feb] reported that Sydney Water has abandoned a decade-long push for Sydneysiders to cut their water usage, and described the decision as short-sighted, designed to preserve corporate profits, to maximise government dividends and to make desalination appear viable.

With the 2nd highest water consumption per household in Australia, Sydney cannot afford to abandon water efficiency programs. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) notes that Sydney Water's spending on efficiency programs has fallen from \$30.5 million five years ago to \$1.5 million last year. "The dramatic cuts are short-sighted," said NCC Chief Executive Officer, Mr Pepe Clarke. "Water efficiency programs have driven substantial reductions in water consumption, but Sydney's water consumption is still high compared to other capital cities. In its national performance report, the National Water Commission found that Sydney Water customers were second only to Melbourne as highest users of water per household". nccnsw.org.au/media/

This regrettable decision surely calls for a strong community response to work to retain, improve and spread water saving practices. Reducing water over-use in washing, showering, and on paths and cars is important. We must not assume that, as the drought has ended, there is no need to conserve water. We must help reduce the demand on water infra-structure and need for more dams.

COAL SEAM GAS

The debate about CSG continues as a battle of economy against environment, with little room for compromise on either side. The main public health issue is the potential chemical water contamination which could seriously affect human health decades after exposure. Health impacts may arise from the use of fracking chemicals or from the release of hydrocarbons and other contaminants from the coal seams. There are indications that high recorded levels of fugitive methane may be contributing to illness in local communities. Adequate assessment and regulation are key measures, and contamination prevention is the goal. As with lead and asbestos, adequate assessment and regulation are key measures. However, the gas industry refuses to disclose what chemicals are actually used in fracking, claims that their procedures use only benign substances, and opposes reasonable regulation. [health risks of gas](http://health.risks.of.gas)

CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT MINING RULES

Both the federal and the state government are seeking reasonable regulation, and are enacting new powers over coal seam gas mining. The results could be useful in sifting out the riskier, more marginal mining and fracking projects, but only time will tell how effective these moves will be. NCC stresses that the new rules must apply retrospectively to projects already under way. www.reuters.com/ <http://www.resources.nsw.gov.au/>

THE GEORGES RIVER (GR)

There are increasing levels of serious sewage pollution of the GR and its tributaries. Minister Greg Pearce's announced [allocation](#) of \$16 million for the Cooks River will certainly enhance the amenity of that area, but it does not address the whole problem. The GR Coastal Zone Management Plan has as its primary goal to conserve and improve the existing natural environment of the GR and the water quality through targeted pollution reduction. The draft plan is on public exhibition for comment until 12th April. You can see it at georgesriver.org.au/Estuary. *State and local government intervention is urgently needed –please have your say!*

WARRAGAMBA DAM

The Colong Foundation notes that in 1995, after a highly successful three-year community-based campaign, the Labor Government rejected a plan to raise Warragamba Dam by 36 metres. Instead, an auxiliary spillway was built to address serious safety issues affecting the dam. Now a second proposal seeking to raise the dam wall by 23m has come forward, virtually identical to the expensive, damaging and simplistic scheme that was rejected in 1995.

<https://www.colongwilderness.org.au/dont-raise-dam> <http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/>

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS OFFICE

EDO has been granted \$1.2 million in funding for the financial year 2013-14. However, support has been reduced by about 27%, so it is facing a substantial shortfall. Public support is urgently needed if EDO is to continue to provide legal advice and representation to community members to use the law to protect the environment.

Go to <http://edo.org.au/edonsw/site/donation.ph> for more information on the Environmental Defence Fund EDO NSW, Level 5, 263 Clarence Street Sydney NSW 2000.

TREE TRIMMING AND POWER LINES

O.F.F. has expressed concern over extreme lopping of street trees around power lines in the Hurstville and Kogarah areas. Recently the lopping has been drastic, unsightly, and potentially tree harmful; see Gungah Bay Rd. Ausgrid, the body responsible for lopping, states that its program to keep trees clear of power lines complies with the law designed to prevent injury to people and damage to property. It notes that the vegetation safety clearance is typically 1.5m around overhead bare, low voltage wires.

Ausgrid offers Councils the option of installing *Aerial Bundled Cable* (ABC), wrapping the low voltage wires into one single insulated cable to protect trees. The safety clearances required for ABC are less than for uninsulated wire, but it is a moderately expensive option. Apparently the Councils must bear the cost, and are reluctant to do so. O.F.F. is appealing for Ausgrid (or the Councils) to apply the ABC tree protective option more broadly. www.ausgrid.com.au/

TOURISM IN NATIONAL PARKS

Peter Prineas is author of the book [Wild Places](#), and a long term contributor to environmental conservation in Australia, an activist, writer and lawyer, beginning with campaigns to save Lake Pedder and the Boyd Plateau. He has spoken at several National Wilderness Conferences, and at a recent meeting of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS), on tourism development in national parks and its effect on nature conservation. The primary purpose of the national park system is nature conservation, with a secondary purpose of providing for recreation compatible with nature conservation. For him, tourism development is the issue, not the visitors, and the threat to parks from inappropriate tourist development is as much a cause for concern as allowing shooters in parks. www.bluemountains.org.au/

BEN BULLEN STATE FOREST

This [Forest](#) is the western gateway to the Gardens of Stone. The Office of Environment and Heritage has noted the Forest as suitable for reservation under the National Parks and Wildlife Act of NSW. **BMCS** is urging people to write or e-mail the appropriate authorities calling for and supporting this reservation. Let us join them! www.bluemountains.org.au/

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FOR 2013

Have you paid your membership fee yet? The fee is \$25 per family. <http://off.oatleypark.com>

COMING EVENTS

Mar 23rd (Sat) Earth Hour 2013 8.30 to 9.30 pm <http://earthhour.org.au/>

Mar 25th (Mon) 7.45pm Regular monthly meeting with **Dr Peter Mitchell**, one of our leading environmental scientists, talking on *Traces of the Ice Age in Sydney*.

April 6th (Sat) Field Day to the Upper Georges River. Participants proceed along the M5 to the Campbelltown Rd exit, go for 2km, and then turn left into Rose Payten Drive. Follow this road, with several name changes, for around 3km to the 'T' intersection. Turn left on to Georges River Rd, and go for another 4km, to meet at the turning circle. The drive from Oatley should take around an hour, to meet at 9.30am. There are 2 short walks of about 5.5km altogether. The first is a gradual descent to an old convict road; the other is down good but steep stairs to a lovely swimming spot called the Basin. Bring lunch and the usual walk requirements. Whilst we can linger at the Basin, there are other options that we can decide about on the day. **Leader: Sharyn Cullis.**

April 22nd (Mon) 7.45pm Regular monthly meeting with **Neil Saintilan** speaking on **Coastal Mangrove, Saltmarsh and Climate Change**. Dr Saintilan is Principal Research Scientist and Head of the Rivers and Wetlands Unit in the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

April 27th (Sat) Field Day to Oatley - Como Bridge Walk. **Leader Graham Austin**

April 28th (Sun) Field Day to Mt Annan Native Botanic Gardens. **Leader Alison Gilroy**

O.F.F. ON CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY 2013

28 people (including 7 children) helped clean up the Poulton Park environs on Sunday morning. There were 11 Bags of recyclables and 20 of rubbish collected. It seemed a similar amount to that collected a few years ago, when OFF last cleaned Poulton Park. [Report by Alison Gilroy]



URBAN ECOLOGY IN A CHANGING WORLD

Associate Professor Dieter Hochuli of Sydney University's School of Biological Sciences spoke on this theme at our last meeting. Research in Sydney's bushland remnants is focussing on the effects on biodiversity of habitat fragmentation, most likely caused by encroaching urban development. He described urbanisation as an extreme and rapidly growing human pressure on the natural world, leading to substantial fragmentation of areas of natural habitat, effecting biodiversity and ecological processes. He noted by way of example that the balance of insect habitat is changing, and many insect-eating small birds are not commonly seen in the areas where they once thrived. An increase in leaf-eating caterpillars, and effects on flora seem related to this change. He commended bush regeneration and suitably planted gardens to augment bushland remnants. He also commended helping urban children connect with nature, watching ants rather than video games. Clearly understanding our changing ecosystems is vital if we are to maintain overall sustainability, and we need to change our expectations of remnant urban bushlands. As we cannot maintain them in their pristine condition, we must maintain them as best we can, appreciate what we have, and not just lament what we have lost. sydney.edu.au/science/biology/

MICHAEL MOBB'S SUSTAINABLE HOUSE

For the O.F.F. field day on Sat 2nd March some 20 people, under overcast conditions, caught the nominated train. As we alighted at Redfern the heavens opened and the wind picked up; but it soon eased, and we had an easy stroll to Chippendale. We passed some lovely old buildings with beautiful brickwork and decorative finishes, and two magnificent native trees, a great example for other councils. Arriving at Michael's house we ended up with a total of 38 participants signing in and paying the \$5 entrance fee. Michael explained in detail how he had made his house sustainable. It is not connected to town water and sewerage (treated in his back-yard); it uses solar electricity and hot water with only a small amount of town gas for cooking (the most efficient method). He grows food in his tiny back-yard and keeps 2 chooks.

Michael was only too happy to answer our many questions. He sold copies of his books, *Sustainable House* and *Sustainable Food*, the latter now available for loan at meetings. Later we had a quick look at the surrounding streets with community plantings of edible and ornamental plants, compost bins and even a lending library in an old esky. It was a most informative and enjoyable morning. [Report

by Graham Lalchere] www.abc.net.au/science/planet/house/special.htm

VALE JIM DOUGLAS

Sadly we have lost another of our valued members. Dr Jim Douglas died on 21st February. He was a committed member of OFF for 28 years. Our sincere sympathy is extended to Jim and Alma's family. There are some interesting details about Jim at www.maths.unsw.edu.au/

BIRD BROCHURE APPEAL

Production of the colour brochure of *Birds of Oatley Park and Lime Kiln Bay* is progressing; the style has been decided and the text completed. All 62 photos have been obtained from 3 different sources. A special thanks to Edwin Vella and Peter Hayler for their generous contributions of high quality photos, including some of species difficult to photograph. Also thanks to those who made donations to produce the brochure. We are waiting now for possible additional funding from Hurstville City Council. [Alan Fairley]

MARCH BLOOMS IN OATLEY PARK

The Sharp Greenhood (*Pterostylis acuminata*) is a ground orchid, with stem to 24cm tall and a solitary flower, 25mm long, translucent green and distinguished by 2 long erect pointed lateral sepals. Mostly it flowers in April-May, but has been spotted in early March on the Headland Track. Alan's whole



list for March can be found at <http://off.oatleypark.com/?p=1910>

FOR NOTING

Annual General Meetings a) BMCS 730pm Wed 27th March at the Conservation Hut. b) Colong Foundation 2pm Mon 29th April at 2/332 Pitt St.

Draft Georges River Estuary Coastal Zone Management Plan is on public exhibition ending on 12th April www.georgesriver.org.au/

Myles Dunphy Streamwatch: Volunteers testing the creek lines flowing to the Georges River meet 9am on Tues 26th March. Detail: Sharyn (9579 1262), Heather (0425 291 879).

Mulga Road Books 89 Mulga Rd Oatley W is operated by Rotary Hurstville and has a wide range of quality second hand books. <http://retarcap.com/mrb/>.

Oatley Heritage & Historical Society's meetings to report on current research will be on 24th May, regarding the history of the Oatley Bowling Club, and on 23rd Aug, and 29th Nov at 10.30 am at the Oatley RSL. www.oatleyheritagegroup.com

O.F.F. 2013 program is now available. If you did not receive one in the mail, please ask for it at the next meeting or download it from <http://off.oatleypark.com/?p=2389>

