

foke



FRIENDS OF
KU-RING-GAI
ENVIRONMENT INC.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

22 MAY 2024

A year later and the warning heading of the President's Report in 2023, which was ***'Get out of the way': Rose Jackson's social housing warning for 'anti-development' Sydney suburbs*** (Tamsin Rose, *The Guardian*, Thursday 13 April 2023), is now a stark and alarming reality!

The then recently sworn in Minister for Housing warned the North Shore that *'medium and high-density social housing developments should be built in Sydney's north shore and eastern suburbs.'* Minister Jackson went on to say that she *'hopes to bring the communities, described by some as anti-development, with her.'* And, if the residents there don't embrace them? Too bad! *'If they can't get behind it, well, get out of the way because we desperately need it.'*

On 14 December 2023 a new State Environmental Planning Policy SEPP was announced and implemented by the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Paul Scully 'to make it faster and easier to build more affordable housing'. Then, just prior to Christmas, the State Government released details of the intention to override the planning controls of NSW councils, using the holiday period to hide the facts from public scrutiny.

The changes announced by Planning Minister Paul Scully proposed new housing policies called 'Changes to create Low and Mid-Rise Housing' and 'Transport Oriented Development Programme' (TOD). The implementation of the new housing reforms was described by Ku-ring-gai Council as being 'extensive impacts for Ku-ring-gai'. Only councils were allowed to submit a written response on the TOD and by the 31 January 2024. Affected residents were denied any consultation with the Government on the TOD.

However, residents were given until 23 February 2024 to make a submission on the Changes to create Low and Mid -Rise Housing Policy.

The Department of Planning's methodology and basis for the selection of the 31 TOD (increased to 38) stations has not been disclosed. The State Government has refused to release the 'Cabinet in confidence' analysis.

Council summarised what the housing reforms changes meant for Ku-ring-gai in the four page information booklet titled ‘Proposed changes to NSW housing policy and its impacts on Ku-ring-gai’ that was sent to all residents in mid-January. Details on the changes, if implemented, were listed as follows:

- ‘Allowing dual occupancies (two dwellings on the same lot) in all low-density residential zones, with a minimum lot size of 450 square metres. Currently dual occupancies are generally not permitted in Ku-ring-gai.
- Allowing terraces, townhouses and 2 storey apartment blocks near railway stations and possibly other local centres. Currently these multi-dwelling housing types are permitted in Ku-ring-gai to a very limited extent.
- Allowing 6-7 storey mid-rise apartment blocks near railway stations and possibly other local centres. Currently mid-rise apartment blocks of up to 5 storeys are permitted in Ku-ring-gai to a limited extent.
- Allowing affordable housing bonuses of up to 30% for floor space ratio and height, on top of the proposed new controls.
- Overriding existing planning controls such as those for heritage conservation areas and environment.
- Introducing ‘non-refusal standards’ for the new planning controls by which development consent may not be refused.
- There will be impacts on heritage, trees, biodiversity, traffic and stormwater.
- Significant tree loss across Ku-ring-gai.
- No consideration currently given to the necessary infrastructure to support density such as schools, transport and community facilities.’

On 16 January, Ku-ring-gai Council also commenced a community survey on the NSW Government’s new housing policies that was promoted to Ku-ring-gai residents and businesses. By 24 January the Council had also established an online survey through which residents could have their say to help form the Council’s submission to the State Government on the Transport Oriented Development Programme, which was due by 31 January 2024. By 31 January, when the TOD submission time closed, there was a total of 2,428 council survey responses received. The Council’s survey closed on Friday 16 February with 5,307 survey responses (the largest opt in survey in past 10 years in Ku-ring-gai).

On receiving the news of the housing reforms, FOKE immediately met and spoke with community groups, the Council’s Acting General Manager, staff and councillors and arranged meetings with local MPs Matt Cross, Alister Henskens and Paul Fletcher to prompt and not only provide support to the Council but also to co-ordinate a Ku-ring-gai wide response to what was being characterised as ‘undemocratic’, ‘top down’, ‘blunt’ housing reforms.

Leading up to the Council’s community information session on 31 January, FOKE had prepared flyers and posters to display on A frames ready for alerting residents to the potential loss of home, heritage trees and wildlife. FOKE collected names of residents willing to help with the distribution of the FOKE flyers. Over the next few weeks FOKE flyers urging residents to send submissions to the NSW Government by the close of submissions on 23 February, 2024 were hand distributed by members and volunteers to 17,500 letterboxes. FOKE also set about studying the government documents and sent a submission on the

Changes to Create Low and Mid-Rise Housing to the Department of Planning before the close of submissions on 23 February, 2024.

At the Council's information session on the 31 January, FOKE met an independent councillor from Canterbury/Bankstown Council, a resident of Randwick, who had come to listen to the Council's presentation. Just a week later, a Zoom meeting with community representatives from across Greater Sydney had been arranged. It was clear from that meeting that the representatives from various suburbs of Sydney shared common concerns and criticisms of the State Government's housing reforms. As a result of that meeting, the Save Greater Sydney Coalition was formed and has been meeting on an almost weekly basis since to galvanise, co-ordinate and plan a Greater Sydney and Six Regions campaign to raise awareness about the housing reforms.

Councillors Martin Smith and Kim Wheatley called an Extraordinary Meeting of Council on 5 February 2024. Following the Mayoral Minute that explained the Council's position on the State Government's housing reforms, a resolution moved and carried unanimously by the councillors was that 'Council:

- A. Condemns the State Government for its irresponsible approach to planning for the future of the built and natural environment in NSW.
- B. Rejects the proposed changes to planning controls and demands that they be withdrawn with genuine consultation to be undertaken with councils and their communities, as intended by the National Housing Accord 2022.
- C. Explore all options to oppose the changes and stop them being implemented.
- D. Lodge applications under the GIPA act to obtain the NSW Government analysis of the proposed planning controls and other information relating to the possible impact on Ku-ring-gai.
- E. Continue to actively inform the community, and request NSROC [The Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils] and Local Government NSW to lobby against the proposed changes to planning controls.
- F. Write to the Mayors of all Sydney metropolitan councils seeking for these councils to fight back and demand that the proposed changes to planning controls be withdrawn.
- G. Arrange for banners in key locations to alert residents to the proposed changes.
- H. Continue to actively campaign against the proposed changes, collaborating with the community, councils and other stakeholders.
- I. Authorise the General Manager to take all action necessary to implement this resolution and otherwise progress the interests of Council consistent with this resolution.'

To raise greater awareness of the impacts of the State Government housing policies, the Save Greater Sydney Coalition organised a 'Minns' Wrecking Ball Rally' in the Domain on Tuesday 12 March at 1.00 pm. Speakers included MPs, Mayors and community representatives. FOKE letterboxed 10,000 flyers to advertise the Rally in the Domain.

The POST reported that:

‘Hundreds of residents rallied against Minns’ planning reforms behind the NSW Parliament House on 12 March 2024. They opposed these rezonings, described as the biggest in Australia's history, and unanimously called on Minns to:

- Immediately withdraw his proposed housing reforms including ‘Changes to create low and mid-rise housing’” and ‘Transport Orientated Development Program’.
- Ensure all NSW local councils retain their current planning, environmental and heritage powers.
- Investigate all alternative solutions to the housing crisis.

Mark Speakman, NSW Opposition Leader, spoke at the rally describing Minns’ one-size-fits-all housing reforms as “lazy”, “arrogant” and one which would “trash” Sydney’s suburbs. Sue Higginson MLC argued that the plans would not deliver “affordable, accessible, safe and sustainable housing”. North Sydney Mayor, Zoe Baker, feared that Minns’ “one-size-fits-all up-zonings from Newcastle to Wollongong and everywhere in between” would only result in “windfall profits” to the property development sector. Alister Henskens, Wahroonga MP, expressed anger that Minns had met “with property developers on about twenty occasions” but not with people who cared about their communities. Judy Munday, lifetime partner of Greens Ban legend the late Jack Munday AO, questioned the Government’s commitment to housing affordability when it showed no commitment to public housing. Paul Fletcher, Federal MP for Bradfield, even spoke, warning that bad processes lead to bad outcomes. Shankar Sapkota, a young renter, said the consultation should be in line with “community values”.’

On 29 April 2024, the State gazetted the ‘State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) Amendment (Transport Oriented Development) 2024’ under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

Planning Minister Paul Scully in the 29 April media release announced that the TOD would commence on Monday 13 May 2024. He stated: ‘Housing is the largest single cost of living issue facing the people of NSW . . . These reforms are a critical part of our plan to deliver more homes as we confront the housing crisis . . . Through this SEPP, there is the capacity to deliver an estimated 170,000 more well-located, well-designed and well-built homes throughout Sydney, the Illawarra, the Hunter and Central Coast.’

The Government’s consultation with councils and industry groups resulted in the following planning controls for the TOD SEPP:

- Permissibility – Allowing residential flat buildings in residential zones and local centre zones, along with shop top housing in local and commercial zones.
- Floor space ratio (FSR) – A maximum FSR of 2.5:1 has been set. This allows for buildings of up to 6 storeys while providing for landscaping, setback, privacy and open space standards to be met.

- Building Height – A 22m height for residential flat buildings to maintain design standards and a maximum building height of 24m for buildings containing shop top housing, to accommodate commercial ceiling height.
- Lot size and width – Introduction of a minimum lot width of 21m and no minimum lot size.
- Street frontages – The inclusion of a clause which applies to local and commercial centres to consider active street frontages of buildings at the ground floor.
- Heritage – Applications involving heritage considerations will continue to be lodged with and assessed by councils. Councils are well placed to assess applications that might involve the removal of a non-contributory building to the heritage value of that area. Any new development needs to improve and enhance the heritage values of those locations.
- Affordable Housing – At least 2 percent mandatory affordable housing contribution, delivered onsite and in perpetuity for developments with a minimum Gross Floor Area of 2000sqm, managed by a Community Housing Provider. The rate will increase over time and will reflect market conditions.
- Apartment Design Guide (ADG) – The ADG will continue to be the principal guiding document for apartment development, including TOD developments.

As part of this consultation, 27 briefings were conducted with all councils proposed to be included in the amending SEPP areas.

To alert residents of Greater Sydney and the SIX Regions to the potential ramifications of the housing reforms, Ku-ring-gai Council published an ‘Open Letter’ in the Sydney Morning Herald (27-28 April) and the Sunday Telegraph (28 April) with the heading ‘NSW Residents – Wake-Up’. Council’s letter questioned the State Government’s lack of commitment in providing infrastructure to support expected growth, and pointed out that millions of dollars in housing contributions would go to the Government from residents, without it committing to or providing new schools, roads, and sports fields for local communities.

At the Extraordinary Meeting on Wednesday 8 May, Ku-ring-gai Council made a unanimous decision to commence legal action to challenge the TOD SEPP. The legal action *Ku-ring-gai Council vs Minister for Planning and Public Spaces* was lodged with the Land and Environment Court on Friday 12 May 2024, with the court mention being set for 5 July 2024.

The Mayoral Minute, in part, stated:

‘On 12th April 2024, the State Government issued a media release claiming that 12 out of 13 councils had been willing to work with them to achieve the Transport Oriented Development Part 2 outcomes, and that the thirteenth was a holdout.

‘On the same day, Mayor Ngai wrote a letter to the Minister stating that this was simply not the case. Mayor Ngai had requested the first meeting with the Minister, and it took over 3 months for the Minister to make time for it to happen. **The Mayor’s request for a 12 month deferral for planning was rejected, despite the Minister giving other councils similar extensions.** A second meeting scheduled for the following week ended up not happening as the Mayor was turned away. Mayor Ngai’s letter to the Minister stated that he was still waiting for the second meeting.

‘On 19th April 2024, the Minister’s office issued a letter stating that they were open to a

second meeting. A meeting was arranged for 2nd May.’

The meeting went ahead with the Minister just doubling down with TOD requirements.

Despite briefings and meetings with Minister Scully and his staff of the Planning Department, and that the Council had questioned, explained and discussed the ramifications of the TOD, the Council was unable to get an extension of time to properly master plan the TOD as other councils have been allowed.

The Extraordinary Meeting of Council also unanimously resolved:

‘That Council commences studies around the four Transport Oriented Development precincts of Gordon, Killara, Lindfield and Roseville to explore better resident outcomes than what is currently in place (as of 13 May 2024). The studies, scenario analysis and community engagement should be presented before councillors within nine months for a decision. Such scenarios may include:

- i) Base Case – Identification of new infrastructure and amenities to support the state-imposed TOD precincts in their current form.
- ii) Minor Amendment Case – In addition to the Base Case, it will selectively spare key Heritage Conservation Areas as well as improve urban canopy outcomes by shifting dwellings towards key sites in the town centre.
- iii) More Extensive Case – In addition to the Base Case, a more ambitious effort to save multiple Heritage Conservation Areas as well as improve urban canopy outcomes by shifting dwellings towards non-heritage areas in the town centre.
- iv) As well as any other scenarios that Council staff choose to identify.’

Following the Extraordinary Meeting of Council and the decision to commence legal action against the TOD, Mayor Ngai’s media release on 9 May 2024 stated that ‘the Councillors had received a briefing from legal advisors before the meeting which reinforced the Council’s decision.

‘We have not taken this decision lightly, but we owe it to residents to fight for our environment and quality of life. Based on our legal advice, we believe we have a strong case and the financial benefits to ratepayers far outweigh the cost.

‘It is of great concern to us that most other councils received 12 month planning extensions when we were denied that opportunity by the Minister for Planning.’

The proposed legal action, Ku-ring-gai Council vs Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, was lodged with the NSW Land and Environment Court on Friday 10 May with the court mention set for Friday 5 July 2024.

It seems apparent that, within Labor ranks, the property industry, a new group named SYDNEY YIMBY and some Sydney journalists, the attitude prevails that the North Shore is a NIMBY area and ‘anti-development’!

Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population data for end of June 2010 to end of June 2022 shows that Ku-ring-gai is slightly ahead of the rest of Sydney with a population increase of 10.2% vs a 9.6%.

We understand that, according to recent net dwelling information received from the Council, it could be safely estimated that a further 500 new dwellings per year have been added in Ku-ring-gai, or approximately 1,500 during the past three years since the Census was undertaken in August 2021.

It is predicted that Ku-ring-gai's four TOD areas will generate 18,000 dwellings (4,452 per suburb) within 400 metres each of Roseville, Lindfield, Killara and Gordon (all within an approximate five-kilometre-long, narrow rail corridor) over the next 15 years.

Ku-ring-gai has met and exceeded targets set by the Labor State Government in 2002, being 10,000 dwellings from 2004-2031. Since then, 4,000 additional dwelling targets were set by the Greater Sydney Commission in the North District Plan to deliver to 2026. However, the Greater Sydney Commission was legally dissolved on 1 January 2024 with its strategic planning functions absorbed by the new Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI). Whilst Ku-ring-gai has been provided housing targets for the TOD of approximately 18,000 dwellings, dwelling targets are still unknown for the Low and Mid-Rise SEPP that will cover the rest of Ku-ring-gai. Those additional dwelling targets are expected in June/July 2024.

Past Ku-ring-gai Council community surveys on planning reveal that residents are generally not opposed to development if new development is respectful of Ku-ring-gai's heritage, protects the nationally significant critically endangered tree canopy and prevents the potential loss of local character and amenity.

The Council's housing survey conducted over January and February received 5,307 survey responses with the survey results being 75% opposed to the proposals (63% strongly oppose) and 22% in support. Even among the renters surveyed, the results were 57% opposed vs 31% in support. The survey results also indicated that terraces and townhouses and 2 storey apartment blocks near rail stations were the most popular preference of those surveyed, whereas allowing apartment blocks of 6-7 storeys and shop-top housing near other local centres were the least popular. The resulting negative impacts on traffic, parking and loss of trees were of most concern.

According to information we received from the March 2024 NSW Budget Estimates hearings questions and answers with Minister Scully and department officials, the Department received approximately 8,000 written responses to the Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy 'from various channels'. The results indicated 67% were critical, 10% were neutral and 23% were in support of the Low and Mid-Rise Housing policy. The results appear to correlate with the results of the Ku-ring-gai Council online housing survey conducted during January and which closed 16 February 2024.

Since the announcement of the TOD SEPP, residents within the four TOD areas in Ku-ring-gai have been inundated with letters and propositions from real estate agencies and developers encouraging them to sign up! Some residents have received up to a dozen letters from prospective developers and property interests to date. The TOD gazettal has further increased the ongoing harassment from property developers and real estate agencies this month.

Planning Minister Paul Scully announced the TOD gazettal on 29 April 2024 to commence on Monday 13 May 2024.

To alert residents of Greater Sydney and the Six Cities Regions of the potential ramifications of the housing reforms, Ku-ring-gai Council published an Open Letter in the Sydney Morning Herald (27-28 April) and the Sunday Telegraph 28 April with the heading 'NSW Residents–Wake-Up'. Council's letter questioned the State Government's commitment to providing infrastructure to support the expected growth, pointing out that millions of dollars in housing contributions will go to the government from residents without it committing to or providing new schools, roads, and sports fields for local communities.

In solidarity with the concerns facing other communities, FOKE agreed to be a signatory to an Open Letter by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society published on Monday 13 May, calling on Premier Minns to exclude the Blue Mountains from the Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy SEPP that is proposed to be gazetted June/July 2024.

Despite the Council's announcement of legal action against the TOD, residents are still receiving letters from developers looking for properties to develop. We know that Savills and Colliers are already advertising expressions of interest for sale of properties in Roseville (Larkin and Pockley Streets) and Killara (Arnold Street) for prospective luxury apartment development. There are bound to be more proposals exposed in the coming weeks and months. Residents are being harassed by property and real estate interests. We are aware of residents feeling fearful and nervous about what adjacent neighbours may be discussing with property investors.

FOKE was invited to give evidence on Monday 20 May at the NSW Parliament Portfolio 7 Committee Inquiry on the Transport Oriented Development Programme along with the National Trust of NSW, the NSW Heritage Council and the Haberfield Association.

We wish the Council every success with the legal action challenging the Transport Oriented Development (TOD). We believe Ku-ring-gai's heritage and environment is worth fighting for!

● **FOKE'S SUBMISSIONS - GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PLANS**

The past year has been extraordinarily demanding for the committee of FOKE in researching, writing, and forwarding submissions in response to State Government proposals and Ku-ring-gai Council policies, plans and developments. All FOKE's submissions are posted on the FOKE website for members and the public to read.

Listed below are submissions FOKE has made to local and state government in 2023 to May 2024

- Planning Proposal 2022-658 Lourdes Retirement Village, 95-97 Stanhope Road Killara – Letter to RFS Commissioner
- Submission – Gardens of Stone Lease
- St Ives Masterplan submission – GeoRegion
- Bendigo Bank submission – Crowd Funding – GeoRegion
- NSFA Proposal – construction of a grandstand and associated facilities at the North Turramurra Recreation Area (NTRA)
- Letter to Council – Recreational Needs Study – Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion
- Roseville Memorial Club - 64-66 Pacific Highway -Draft Planning Agreement submission

- Letter to Emergency Services Minister – re Lourdes Retirement Village Planning Proposal 2022 -658
- Submission – Lizard Rock Planning Proposal
- FOKE’s address at Public Forum 14 November 2023 re Medium Density in R2 Zones
- Verbal submission to the Sydney North Planning Panel determination of Lourdes Retirement Village Planning Proposal PP 2022-658, 15 December 2023
- Letter of thanks to Mr John McKee, former General Manger of Ku-ring-gai Council
- Inquiry into the Planning System and the Impacts of Climate Change on the Environment – Portfolio 7 Committee NSW Parliament
- Submission on the Minns Government Housing Policy – Low and Mid-Rise Housing
- Submission – TOD Inquiry – Portfolio 7 Committee NSW Parliament
- Submission – Guidelines for Synthetic Turf in Public Open Spaces
- Submission – Reclassification of Secret Park Pacific Highway Pymble to Operational Land
- Submission – FOKE’s Opening Statement – NSW Parliament Portfolio7 Committee Inquiry – “The Planning System and the impacts of climate change on communities and the environment.” Friday 10 May 2024, Dee Why RSL.
- Submission – FOKE’s Opening Statement – NSW Parliament Portfolio 7 Committee Inquiry into the Transport Oriented Development Programme (TOD).

Together with the written submissions FOKE sent several emails directly to the Mayor and councillors on matters being debated at Council meetings in support of FOKE’s earlier submissions. Generally, FOKE’s submissions are copied to Members of Parliament--Matt Cross MP, the Hon. Alister Henskens SC MP, and the Hon. Paul Fletcher MP--to keep them updated as to FOKE’s work.

With Jonathan O’Dea MP for Davidson not contesting the election in March 2023, FOKE wrote and thanked him for his assistance to FOKE, his 16 years of service to the Davidson electorate and wished him well for the future and new career opportunities.

FOKE wrote and congratulated the newly elected Member for Davidson, Matt Cross. We would like to thank Matt for the several meetings we have had in his office over the past year to discuss the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion project and the State Government Housing Policies and Reforms.

Following the shock announcement of MP Matt Cross’s cancer diagnosis in May 2024, we wished him a speedy and full recovery to good health from the committee of FOKE.

We anticipate 2024 will be another busy year in defending Ku-ring-gai’s heritage, environment and lifestyle against the undemocratic imposition of the Minns Housing Policy reforms. The reforms commenced with the gazettal on 29 April 2024 of the four Transport Oriented Development (TOD) suburbs – Roseville, Lindfield, Killara and Gordon. Council has been able to receive TOD development applications from 13 May 2024.

• **KU-RING-GAI GEOREGION, POTENTIAL UNESCO GEOPARK LISTING**

In 2018 FOKE initiated a project to add extra protections to, and increase awareness of, Ku ring-gai’s natural heritage focusing originally on Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. This has since developed into a much broader area as FOKE has advanced the proposal of the Ku-

ring-gai GeoRegion (KGR), with Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park as its centre, by extending along Berowra Valley, from the Hawkesbury River to northern Lane Cove National Park and east to the coast from Barrenjoey to Dee Why. This large area, of approximately 44,000 ha, across northern Sydney showcases exceptional characteristics, with over 50 nationally and internationally significant geological environments of the Triassic sandstone landscapes of the Sydney Basin, volcanic diatremes, and unique and rare flora and fauna, as well as a density of Aboriginal sites that reflects the length of habitation in this area, with 1,424 sites currently recorded.

Over the past year, work has focused on progressing six geotrails/geosites which currently include the following:

- Thornleigh/Hornsby diatreme geotrails and geosites (Hornsby)
- Browns Field geotrail with new signage funded by an Environmental Levy grant courtesy of Ku-ring-gai Council.
- Sheldon Forest geotrail (Ku-ring-gai)
- West Head geotrail (NPWS)
- Long Reef geotrail (Northern Beaches)
- Bicentennial Park Geosite (Ku-ring-gai)

This geotrail/geosite establishment work has been directed by the KGR Geotrail Development Group comprising representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the three Councils, and the project's Steering Committee, the latter comprising A/Chair Angus M Robinson (also a FOKE member and National Geotourism Strategy Coordinator for the Australian Geoscience Council, now rebranded as Geotourism Australia), Bob Conroy (former Executive Director, NSW NPWS), Dr John Martyn (Geologist and author), Dr Peter Mitchell OAM (Environmental scientist, former academic), Jayden Walsh (Ecologist), David Robson (Retired Chief Geophysicist from the Geological Survey of NSW) and Robert Corkery (environmental and geological specialist).

Applications for sponsorship and grant funding from various sources will continue to be sought to advance the geotrail development, particularly with the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and the three Council areas. FOKE was delighted to receive from the Bendigo Adelaide Bank a grant of \$1000 which was presented at a special function held in February 2024, and special thanks go to the Bank and sponsoring Director, Jennifer Anderson (the former Mayor of Ku-ring-gai Council). This funding is to be expended on a website dedicated to the GeoRegion.

The function in February 2024 enabled the Committee members present to meet and discuss various possible collaborative opportunities with three other grantees with interests in schools, education and scouting (Sheldon Forest related)—of significance given the need to convince UNESCO of our community engagement efforts.

During the past year, Kathy Cowley and Angus M Robinson have briefed local politicians at all three levels of government and various community groups involving FOKE members (Kathy Cowley, Angus M Robinson, John Martyn, Bob Conroy, and Peter Mitchell).

In November, the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC) received advice from a meeting of geoscience agencies of the Australian governments that GeoRegions are now considered an

essential step in advancing any geopark proposal and that the assessment and input into the further development of established GeoRegions are the responsibility of individual States/Territories, as legislation and tenure arrangements for land access are quite different in each jurisdiction. Any group wishing to establish a geopark from within an established GeoRegion will need to make representations to the designated State/Territory government agencies to determine how a proposal can be assessed, and the types of works to be undertaken within a GeoRegion before it can be processed for approval. The AGC has determined that the KGR project is one of three approved significant pilots for geotourism development in Australia and noted that the KGR project has already received support some time ago from the Geological Survey of NSW.

The major co-authored technical review paper (with Bob Conroy as the lead author) that was published in the Linnean Society of NSW Proceedings journal in early 2023 has been reprinted and is available for purchase at the NPWS Information Centre at Bobbin Head.

The KGR is again featuring in the National Trust's Australian Heritage Festival in May 2024, thanks to the coordinating efforts of Janine Kitson, with organised GeoRegion walks at three geotrail/geosite sites (Bicentennial Park, Sheldon Forest, and Long Reef) with Dr John Martyn and Peter Mitchell OAM as leaders with a keynote afternoon talk addressed by Dr Peter Mitchell OAM.

We thank Acting Chair Angus M Robinson for the above report. We also wish to express our thanks to the members of the Steering Committee for their outstanding commitment and achievements to date.

● **BETTER PLANNING NETWORK NEWS**

We are pleased to report that Christiane Berlioz (a member of the FOKe committee) was voted onto the Better Planning network (BPN) Leadership Group in March 2023 and again in March this year. Christiane's previous experience as a former ward councillor for St Ives and President of the St Ives Progress Association has been of invaluable experience for her role with the BPN in dealing with various planning issues.

The stated aim of BPN is to actively promote the planning principles outlined in the BPN *Planning for People Charter* and to represent the interests of members and communities to government. BPN continues to inform members such as FOKe (a foundation group member) of government policies and processes in the context of the many new planning changes across NSW.

Throughout the year, BPN's Leadership Group attended several stakeholder meetings held online by the Planning Department, at which various heads of departments were also present.

Some of the topics discussed at monthly stakeholder meetings were:

- **Transport Oriented Development**
- **Renewable Energy Assessment:** handling a substantial pipeline of renewable energy projects, including solar farms, wind farms, battery storage, pumped hydro and transmission line projects.
- **Biodiversity Conservation Act reform:** responding to the outcomes of the Dr Ken Henry-led Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 at the State

level and reform initiatives at the Commonwealth level. Collaborating with other government entities to ensure a consistent approach and alignment with government agendas.

- **Aboriginal Cultural Heritage:** engaging in discussions regarding reforms in Aboriginal cultural heritage closely linked to government-led changes in this area.
- **Government Architect:** work is underway on developing pattern books to streamline low to mid-rise development, aiming to reduce costs and facilitate smoother development assessment processes.
- **Other planning policy areas:** including managing ongoing reforms from previous years, such as the BASIX reforms and the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan, and addressing issues related to the NSW Planning Portal, including resolving customer complaints and planning for improvements to ensure sustainability.

The above policy areas represent key priorities for Development Assessment in 2024 with a focus on housing, renewable energy, biodiversity, Aboriginal cultural heritage, Government Architect initiatives and NSW Planning Portal enhancements.

- Aboriginal Planning Initiatives
- Sustainable building SEPP
- Social and Affordable Housing
- Submission Policy
- National Housing Accord

The BPN Leadership Group made a number of submissions on a range of proposed legislative and regulatory changes. Some of these submissions included:

- Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016
- Submission into the Legislative Council Inquiry into the NSW Planning System and the Impacts of Climate Change on the Environment and Communities
- Explanation of Intended Effect: Changes to create Low and Mid-Rise Housing, NSW Department of Planning and Environment

As with most voluntary organisations, the BPN is finding it hard to maintain a full and functioning committee due to members leaving the committee after many years of campaigning and responding to the State Government's legislation and policies. BPN is in the process of restructuring the Leadership Group to fill vacancies that were not filled at the AGM.

The BPN also sent a submission (as mentioned above) to the State Government on the NSW Housing Reforms—changes to create Low and Mid-Rise Housing and the Portfolio 7 Committee Inquiry into the Transport Oriented Development Programme Inquiry. Christiane gave evidence on behalf of BPN at the Portfolio 7 Committee Inquiry into the TOD this week, along with the Total Environment Centre and the Save Greater Sydney Coalition.

• NATURE CONSERVATION COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP NEWS

FOKE is a member of the Nature Conservation Council. The NCC is the State's peak environment organisation and provides a single voice for 180 environment groups across

NSW dedicated to protecting and conserving the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources. The NCC makes a number of submissions in response to environmental issues, policies and plans each year on behalf of its membership.

NCC environmental policies outline a positive vision for a sustainable future for New South Wales. Through the annual conference, the NCC formulates policy positions on a diverse range of environmental issues including:

- Climate Change Policy
- Urban Density Policy
- Biosecurity Policy
- Bushfire Policy
- Flying Fox Policy
- Forest Policy
- Intrinsic Value of Nature Policy
- Planning Policy
- Water Policy
- Steady state economy policy

Some of the significant government and policy issues that were covered in NCC submissions over 2023 were:

- 5 Year Statutory Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act.
- Proposed Changes to the Kosciuszko National Park Feral Horse Management Plan.
- Inquiry into the Planning System and the Impacts of Climate Change on the Environment and Communities.
- Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023
- Coastal Floodplain Drainage Programme
- Statutory Review of the Crown Lands Management Act 2016
- Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023

We congratulate Janine Kitson, FOKE's Vice President, who was a finalist for the *Jack Munday Award* at the NCC Environment Awards held 27 March 2024. FOKE was also advised of being a nominee on the short list for the *Marie Byles Award* for work in protecting Ku-ring-gai's natural, built and cultural heritage (including promoting the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion).

• NATIONAL TRUST - AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL

FOKE planned four events for the 2023 Australian Heritage Festival conducted through the National Trust. Again, we thank Janine Kitson for her organisation of the FOKE National Trust Heritage Festival events and also the Geo-Region committee members, Angus Robinson, Dr John Martyn, and Dr Peter Mitchell OAM, who were involved in organising and running the events.

One event, the walk in the Sheldon Forest, had to be postponed due to a bad weather forecast but was rescheduled for Sunday 11 June. The four events planned for the National Trust Heritage Festival 2023 included:

- West Pymble Bicentennial Park Walk, Sunday 16 April 2023, led by Geologist Dr John Martyn.
- Browns Field Walk, Sunday 23 April 2023, led by Dr John Martyn.

- Sheldon Forest Walk, Sunday 30 April 2023 (rescheduled to Sunday 11 June), led by Australia's leading geotourism proponents Angus M Robinson and geologist Dr John Martyn.
- Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Cultural Heritage—Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion Talk and Luncheon, Sunday 7 May 2023. Dr Peter Mitchell OAM outlined the natural and cultural history of Ku-ring-gai and why a GeoRegion is a 'no threat' good idea.

FOKE planned four similar events for the 2024 National Trust Heritage Festival to highlight the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion. The first event was to be held on Sunday 5 May with a tour of Long Reef. Unfortunately, three of FOKE's Heritage Festival events were cancelled due to rain and have been rescheduled for dates in June starting with the Long Reef Walk on Sunday 2 June.

The afternoon talk on the GeoRegion by Dr Peter Mitchell OAM held last Saturday 17 May, highlighted key geological aspects of Long Reef and the Hornsby (Quarry) Diatreme.

• FOKE WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

As the President, it is simply impossible to manage the day-to-day running of FOKE without a team of wonderful volunteers and experts.

We thank Leo Martyn, web developer, for the wonderful professional assistance he provides FOKE. Ursula Bonzol continues to be our webmaster despite having taken leave from the committee for travelling overseas during 2023-2024. We thank Ursula and Janine Kitson for collaborating on managing the website content, keeping posts on current issues affecting Ku-ring-gai updated and promoted, as well as addressing with Leo any technical problems as they arise on the website.

• FOKE'S STUDENT PRIZES

Jan Langley Sustainability Award –Lindfield East Public School

Congratulations to Charlie Fletcher from Lindfield East Public School as the winner of the 2023 Jan Langley Sustainability Award. The award was presented by Kathy Cowley, President of FOKE.

This statement was read at the presentation: "Charlie has been a keen, conscientious and diligent 'Eco Gardener' for several years. Charlie's main role is making sure the native birds are given fresh food and water and that their cage is always clean. He is always concerned about the bird's welfare. Charlie also helps care for the chicken, watering and harvesting the produce. Congratulations Charlie."

Jan Langley was a former Lindfield East Public School parent who volunteered for the school as well as being on the FOKE committee for many years by way of fulfilling her commitment to sustainability and the environment.

Jean Posen Environment Award – Lindfield Public School

FOKE congratulates Olivia Koper, the Lindfield Public School's 2023 recipient of the Jean Posen Award. Olivia received the award due to being a student who exhibits passion,

enthusiasm and a general commitment to improving sustainable practices and caring for the school environment. Kathy Cowley presented the award on behalf of FOKE.

The Award remembers Jean Posen, long standing FOKE committee member and passionate advocate for speaking out and protecting Ku-ring-gai's environment.

●FOKE COMMITTEE

FOKE is so fortunate to have a dedicated group of women on its committee—Ursula Bonzol (on leave), Joy Bryan, Christiane Berlioz, Carolyn Darby, Janet Harwood, Denise Hendy, Janine Kitson, Katrina Pickles, Dinah Warner, and Tanya Wood. I would personally like to thank them all so much for their commitment to FOKE and their contribution to the committee organisation and campaigning throughout the year.

We continue to hold committee meetings via ZOOM and have recently upgraded to an annual subscription to ZOOM to enable the committee to hold meetings longer than the maximum 40 minutes.

Tanya Wood has continued in the Treasurer's role, methodically keeping the FOKE financials up to date, checking the PO Box as well as posting membership correspondence. Tanya has agreed to remain as treasurer for 2024. FOKE was required to change the postal box address to Gordon Post Office (PO Box 584) during the year, due to the sudden closure of the Killara Post Office.

Despite recovering from a terrible accident Jill Johnstone has carried on managing and updating FOKE's membership lists, for which we are so grateful and thankful. A former long-standing committee member, Jill's wonderful help with the FOKE membership record keeping and the printing of envelope labels for postage is greatly appreciated.

With Ursula Bonzol's leave from the committee, Vice President, Janine Kitson continued in the role to collect, organise, write, and edit the newsletter, *FOKE Talk*. Last month we converted our online newsletters from YMLP to Mailchimp. We hope you like the new format.

We thank our dedicated and patient Minutes Secretary, Katrina Pickles, for her great care in recording and writing up the committee meeting minutes after every meeting. Also, our appreciation and thanks to our Public Officer Carolyn Darby, for reporting to the committee on decisions made by Ku-ring-gai Council and the Sydney North Planning Panel and Ku-ring-gai Planning Panel and Ku-ring-gai Planning Panel.

Special thanks again to our long-standing member and auditor Bruno Codemo, who has overseen our accounts and provided FOKE's AGM Statement of Accounts since 1995. Bruno's professional accounting expertise and assistance to FOKE each year is greatly appreciated.

●FOKE MEMBERSHIP

We thank our FOKE members for their ongoing support of FOKE and for the generous donations we receive each year along with the annual renewal fee. We hope you are satisfied with the job we are doing.

In April the Ku-ring-gai Preservation Trust (KPT), a community group that has now folded, presented FOKE with a cheque for \$4,000, being the Trust's remaining funds. The KPT's generous donation was timely in helping to offset some of the costs FOKE has spent on flyers, posters and banners in FOKE's campaign against the State Government housing reforms—the 'Minns' Wrecking Ball' campaign, the campaign that the Save Greater Sydney Coalition has also adopted. We also thank the members and residents who have also given donations towards the campaign. FOKE's work (along with FOKE's involvement in the Save Greater Sydney Coalition) will be ongoing and we are currently planning the next stage of the campaign.

Whilst the TOD SEPP was gazetted (29 April 2024) and commenced 13 May, we are still waiting for the release of the State Government's Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy SEPP which is expected at the end of June 2024. That SEPP is expected to impact the rest of Ku-ring-gai by way of permitting dual occupancies, terraces, town houses and manor houses. The SEPP will affect the whole of NSW.

This year we will be celebrating FOKE's 30th anniversary and we will plan and announce a celebration event before the end of the year and we hope members will attend.

We also hope the work FOKE has been undertaking for the past 30 years has been in line with members expectations and aspirations. The ongoing and difficult task of protecting Ku-ring-gai's environment and heritage will be put to its greatest test with the imposition and commencement of the Transport Oriented Development SEPP and Low and Mid-Rise Housing SEPP expected to commence in June/July.

FOKE remains committed to work on behalf of members to ensure MPs and Ku-ring-gai councillors are engaged with FOKE's issues. 2024 will be a year for very dedicated community activism not only in Ku-ring-gai but across Greater Sydney and the Six Regions of NSW. The proposed and sudden housing changes will highlight the considerable heritage and environmental issues at stake, including urban density and population pressures, climate change impacts and further ecological and biodiversity degradation.

●IN CLOSING

FOKE is a group of deeply committed residents who wish to pass onto future generations a Ku-ring-gai which has a long and ecologically sustainable future. As a committee we cannot do this alone and so we will be calling on our members for your continuing support throughout the year in our efforts to try to hold back the destruction of Ku-ring-gai's heritage and special environment, particularly from the housing policies being imposed by the State Government.

We wish our members good health, and a productive and fulfilling year ahead. I will look forward to welcoming members to the 30th AGM in May 2025.

Kathy Cowley

PRESIDENT
May 2024