

# We the Peoples

Report from the Millennium Forum, 22-26 May  
2000, New York,

by *Miriam Verbeek*

It stirs the soul when two thousand people spontaneously rise to their feet and clap with solemn dignity at the entrance of a man to the room. A mark of respect for a single person that said as much for his achievements as for the achievements and hopes of those assembled.

The man was Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General. The “room” was the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations in New York. The assembled “peoples” were delegates from over 1000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations from more than 100 countries. We had gathered to formulate a declaration to the Governments of the world on a range of urgent issues effecting the global community. Our aim was to present a united front to world leaders, calling for action that would benefit all of us – we the peoples.

Kofi Annan, in his opening address, listed the issues in his quiet, but compelling voice: peace; justice and the eradication of poverty; the human impact of rising violence and armed conflicts; widespread violations of human rights; new and emerging diseases such as HIV/AIDS which devastate entire societies around the world; the inequitable effects of globalisation and advances in technology; inability of the poorest nations to repay debts to the richest nations; the devastating social impacts of World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) decisions; proliferation of nuclear arms; and the ongoing role of the United Nations (UN) in world affairs.

Fourteen Australians attended the forum. Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) sent two delegates, Jim Sloan and myself. We took with us a passionate desire to advance efforts towards sustainable living, and a more equitable distribution of wealth. We also took with us a desire to learn first-hand about the many issues that affect the world community and that Australian’s are often isolated from.

We take for granted, in Australia, our rights to education, to healthcare, to justice, and



*Miriam Verbeek at the UN Forum*

to democratic processes. We grumble about the inadequacy of these rights, but they are taken seriously in our society, and governments rise and fall according to their commitment to them. This situation is not the norm in many countries. Slavery, particularly of women and children, lack of basic healthcare, lack of education, environments that have degraded beyond habitation, ongoing civil strife fuelled by global arms trade. These were the realities that many delegates experienced.

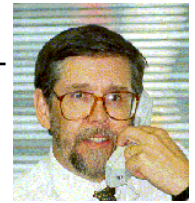
Among the greatest concerns noted at the forum was the inequitable effects of globalisation. Globalisation is the word used for the current quick movement of people, ideas and goods around the world with only few national restrictions. Communications and technology, coupled with international trade laws, have brought immense benefits to many people, especially people in developed countries such as Australia. Globalisation is riding on the back of unsustainable consumption by developed countries. It is riding on the back of taking resources from poor and powerless people in both developed and undeveloped nations and transferring them to the wealthy and powerful.

Kofi Annan provided the following analogy:

“Let us imagine, for a moment, that the world really is a “global village” ... Say this village has 1,000 individuals with all the characteristics of today’s human race distributed in exactly the same proportions. What would it look like? What would we see as its main challenges?”



THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE SUTHERLAND  
SHIRE ENVIRONMENT  
CENTRE



*Jim Sloan  
Executive Officer*

Well we're half way through our first year of the new millennium and the Centre has been a hive of activity. We participated in Cleanup Australia Day in March, launched *KURNELL, Birthplace of Modern Australia* on our website in April, participated in Sutherland Council's Big Gig at Hazelhurst in May and sent two representatives to the United Nations in New York. Overdevelopment. The nuclear reactor, population, our rivers, Kurnell, traffic and electromagnetic radiation have probably been the most pressing issues this year.

The Centre now has members representing us on a number of Council sub-committees. It is important that we keep a high level of participation in this area, as it helps us to respond to local issues with a better perspective on the topic. We are always looking for new residents from the community to register their environmental interests with us, so that we can involve them

where possible in sub-committees and activities we participate in. It is becoming more difficult for the Centre to take on issues on behalf of the community, without a significant effort from those individuals within the community that raise the issue. Our Management Committee is always happy to hear delegations from the community at our regular meetings held on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30pm in the Centre.

We will support your efforts to address an issue by giving you access to our time, photocopying, computers and the Internet, our reference library and advocacy on your behalf at all levels of government. We are currently gathering materials for best practice and ideas, which will help skill us in the best way to respond in an environmentally sensitive way to stop degradation or improve on our community's environment. We are also researching potential projects and ways to fund them.

I was one of the representatives the Cen-

tre sent to the United Nations to participate in largest group of NGOs to ever meet at the UN. It was a wonderful exercise of democracy in action. 1350 NGO representatives from at least 113 countries met in New York for 5 days. The needs we brought with us from our many communities and countries were often very different, but our desire to formulate a declaration to the world in one voice was passionately similar. We crawled, we slipped, we learned, we hobbled, we walked and then finally we resolutely strode forward as one united voice. I found this to be a tiring and incredibly hard process at times, but also informative, inspiring and uplifting as we the peoples begin our new millennium.

Miriam and I will be following up our visit to the UN with a number of workshops in the coming months that I believe our community will find very useful.

*Continued page 2*

## **We the Peoples** — *from page 1*

"Some 150 of the inhabitants live in an affluent area of the village, about 780 in poorer districts. Another 70 or so live in a neighbourhood that is in transition. The average income per person is \$6,000 a year, and there are more middle income families than in the past. But just 200 people dispose of 86% of all the wealth, while nearly half of the villagers are eking out an existence on less than \$2 per day.

"Men outnumber women by a small margin, but women make up a majority of those who live in poverty. Adult literacy has been increasing. Still, some 220 villagers – two thirds of them women – are illiterate. Of the 390 inhabitants under 20 years of age, three fourths live in poorer districts, and many are looking desperately for jobs that do not exist. Fewer than 60 people own a computer and only 24 have access to the Internet. More than half have never made or received a telephone call.

"Life expectancy in the affluent district is nearly 78 years, in the poorer areas 64 years – and in the very poorest neighbourhoods a mere 52 years. Each marks an improvement over previous generations, but why do the poorest lag so far behind? Because in their neighbourhoods there is a far higher incidence of infectious diseases and malnutrition, combined with an acute lack of access to safe water, sanitation, health care, adequate housing, education and work.

"There is no predictable way to keep the peace in this village. Some districts are relatively safe while others are racked by organised violence. The village has suffered a growing number of weather-related natural disasters in recent years, including unexpected floods and droughts, while the average temperature is perceptibly warmer. More and more evidence suggests that there is a connection between these two trends, and that warming is re-

"Carbon emissions, the major cause of warming, have quadrupled in the last 50 years. The village's water table is falling precipitously, and the livelihood of one sixth of the inhabitants is threatened by soil degradation in the surrounding countryside."

Delegates to the Forum explored and discussed the challenges posed by Kofi Annan's bleak analogy. Central to the discussion was a confirmation that NGOs are playing an ever greater role in social processes and environmental protection. NGOs represent groups and issues that traverse national borders, exposing problems that national governments may wish to hide for political reasons, and helping those who are powerless. We concluded that given our role in world affairs, NGOs should have a greater voice in world affairs. This call was made loud and clear at Seattle at the WTO talks and it was reinforced by all speakers at the Forum.

The declaration and agenda for action agreed to by Forum delegates, after five days of often torrid debate, is a united stand by NGOs of the world. In the words of the Deputy Secretary-General to the UN, Louise Frechette, who accepted the declaration from NGOs in the final hour of the forum, it marks a significant achievement. She was impressed that so many people, representing so many issues, could agree on a cohesive statement to world governments.

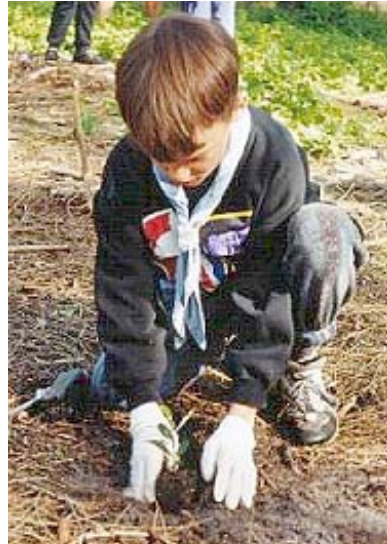
Those of you interested in reading through the eighteen-page declaration can find it on SSEC's website (<http://ssec.org.au>), view it at the Centre office, or obtain a copy from the Centre. In our minds, although we have returned to Australia, the work of the Forum is only just beginning. No message was clearer than the one that told us that problems we confront in our community and in our nation are shared globally. The task challenging us now is to transform the very many papers and books we lugged back from New York into information for the Centre's members, for local governments, for other NGOs in Australia, for the State Government and for the Federal Government. In the meantime, if you want to view the material, drop in to the Centre and scan the files.



The Centre's Coastcare-funded rainforest restoration project in Towra Point Nature Reserve finished on a high this month. Recently Friends of Towra volunteers helped out during a Saturday morning with follow-up weeding and primary removal of lantana. This project has been ongoing since August 1998 and after 18 months we are now beginning to see some positive ecological benefits for the rare and threatened rainforest species that exist on the site. During the project, the littoral rainforest was listed as an Endangered Ecological Community under the Threatened Species Conservation Act. As a result of being liberated from the choking impacts of the lantana, rainforest seedlings are beginning to thrive.

In the process of removing lantana from within the pocket of rainforest and from around the freshwater wetland known as Weedy Pond, a corridor of rehabilitated bushland was created between two shorelines of the Nature Reserve.

In May and June a group of cub scouts and Venturers from Kirrawee, Gynea and North Engadine assisted by planting up to 150 banksia trees on the site in areas that have been cleared of weeds.



*Cub scout planting banksia tree*

The Friends of Towra returned to the site in early June which effectively acted as a handover exercise. With the project funding concluding in June, future maintenance and follow-up weeding will be undertaken by the Friends of Towra under the supervision of National Parks and Wildlife Service. During this hand-over period a site and project report will be produced which will include photos and descriptions of the

important native species that exist on the site as well as a list of priorities for future work on the site. Apart from the on-ground outcomes, the project has provided an opportunity to educate and inform the community about Towra and about our coastal environment and to introduce them to new skills in bush regeneration.

Those who have participated over the past 18 months have included Rotarians, young unemployed people, international backpackers, Lend Lease personnel, community volunteers, Friends of Towra, TAFE students, cubs and Ventures. Expert project supervision was provided by Chris Brogan from Earth Repair and Eco-hort. The support and cooperation of National Parks and Wildlife Service via Jamie Erskine and Georgina Eldershaw has also been appreciated. Without the assistance of all these people, the project would not have been possible.

The project will also have other longer term effects. A new sign was also erected on the site which will inform and educate passers-by about the project and the importance of the site for many years. Details about the project can be viewed by a wide audience on the Centre's TOWRA-Net website (<http://ssec.org.au/towra>)

## fundraising

### Fundraising Committee says:

Yes, fundraising can be fun, but often a lot of hard work. So, in order to streamline our efforts and make best use of our people, resources and time, six of our regular street stall workers had a lunch-time discussion recently. We came up with the following suggestions.

1. Volunteers to work on the stalls in Gynea shopping centre – WE NEED MORE. So will you please help for a few hours either between 8:30am to 12 noon or 12 noon to 3:30pm or part thereof?
2. Transport – we need back-up support. At present either one or two members in Caringbah pick up six folding tables and plants from Don Shirley's home in Caringbah and transport them to Gynea by 7:00am or soon after where Don, Dave and Pat set out folding tables cover them and unpack goods Pat has brought. Plants are set up nearby. A standby volunteer to transport these tables and plants would

be a big help – preferably someone from the eastern end of the Shire to avoid any delays getting over the Woronora River.

3. Ruth transports the bulk of the goods, stored at her home in Bangor, by 8 – 8:30am. Is there a volunteer in the western area of the Shire who could be on stand-by if necessary?

4. Conversely, at about 2:00 to 2:30pm we need to pack up and return left over goods back to Bangor and also need someone to return tables and any left over plants back to Caringbah.

5. Goods must be in good order, clean, nothing chipped, broken or out of order. This applies especially to hardware and electrical goods. We will on occasion discard anything unsuitable.

6. Clothes – only smaller items such as jumpers, shorts etc. which can be folded and put in large \$2 bargain basket. It's not possible to display dresses, coats, suits etc. on clothes dryers.

7. SHOES – No! No footwear please – possibility of germs.

8. BOOKS – no more for the present

**NEXT STREET STALL  
SATURDAY 19 JULY 2000  
In front of "Tuckerbag",  
Gynea Shopping Centre**

please. We have enough on hand. They are usually heavy and hard to transport, hard to display and don't bring in much money.

9. CAKES, JAMS & PICKLES etc. always in demand and donations always needed – good money earners.

10. PRICING – all goods need to be priced beforehand if possible – if not, the early birds on the stall should do so.

11. NEXT STREET STALL – Sat 19 July. If you can help in any way then or later please ring SSEC on 9545 3077, Ruth 9543 1857 or Pat 9523 9842. Thanks for your help in advance.

Pat Elphinston, Ruth Zeibots  
– for the Committee

## The Kurnell Peninsula – a proud history?

Following the release of the book on the history of Kurnell by local historian Daphne Salt, we now have a greater awareness than ever of Kurnell's history – but what can we learn and how will this affect Kurnell's future?

There are many turning points in Kurnell's history since European settlement. With the recommendation for a "Noxious Reserve" on the Peninsula in the 1880s, came a decision which may well have shaped the patterns of land use up to the present – land use that has put the Peninsula's important ecological values under strain ever since. Granted, exploitation of the Peninsula by early settlers had taken place well before this decision, but the Noxious Reserve is one of the more significant events in the checkered history of the Kurnell Peninsula.

A quick sample of this history.

We learn from Daphne's book that extensive areas of native vegetation on the Peninsula were cleared and burnt in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to make way for sheep and cattle. The sheep and cattle effectively denuded sand dunes of grasses thereby leaving them exposed to erosional elements. In an attempt to reverse the instability, buffalo grass was

planted on the Peninsula, a grass which is now a significant weed on Towra Point. Grazier endeavours proved in general terms to be unsuccessful, at which point, areas of turpentine, ironbark, blackbutt and mahogany forest were felled for use in the timber industry.

With the sand dunes exposed, they then became the target of sandminers who were granted mining leases by the State Government in the 1930s. The then Shire Council had discussed purchasing 720 acres of land including sand dunes and areas at Towra Point for inclusion in a national park but Shire President, John Monro used his casting vote to veto this idea. Much of the sand dunes then remained in private hands and continue to be mined to this day.

Another turning point in Kurnell's history was the establishment of the Oil Refinery. In 1951 Caltex had approached Council for approval to build the refinery but were refused on the basis that such an establishment would desecrate Captain Cook's Landing Place. However, that decision was reversed (with conditions) when the State Government intervened, gave approval to Caltex, and directed Cumberland County Council to change the zoning to facilitate their establishment. Construction then began in 1953. Today the refinery overshadows the Kurnell village and is a source of concern to some residents.

What then of more recent Kurnell history?

In 1989, the State Government's Planning Department put in place the *Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No.17 – Kurnell Peninsula*, which stated protection of the natural environment as one of its objectives. But in the 11 years subsequent to that plan being gazetted, many wonder if this objective has been accomplished. Sandmining has continued at an increasing rate, spot rezonings have taken place, and various residential, industrial and tourism unit complexes have been proposed

and in a number of cases approved (with help from the Land and Environment Court) on environmentally sensitive sites. It is only less-than-favourable economic conditions that have meant that these developments have not been followed through with. Yet!

But what of the future? Will a release of Daphne Salt's comprehensive history of Kurnell assist in any way to improve our understanding of Kurnell and thus the way planning is focussed in the future?

In 1998, Kurnell Regional Environment Planning Council (KREPC) – a new coalition of 9 community environment groups (the Centre included) – emerged with the goal of working to secure a sound future for the natural environment and cultural heritage of the Kurnell Peninsula. It may be up to KREPC to take the lead in campaigning for responsible landuse planning, and a sound future for the Peninsula in 10 years, 20 years and beyond.

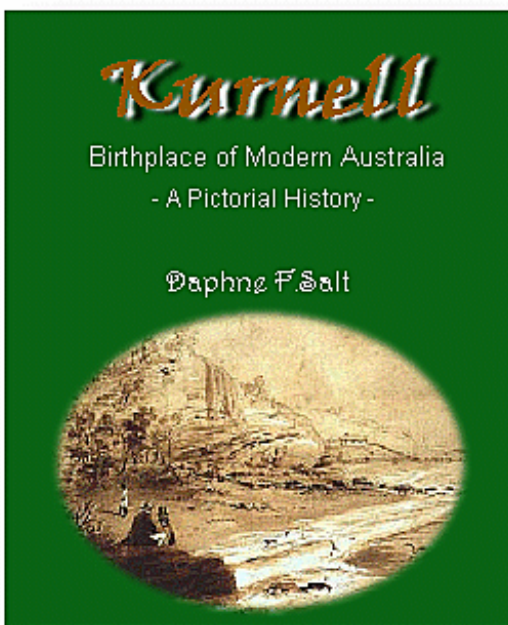
With the election of a new Council in September 1999 came a change in direction through establishment of a new Kurnell Working Party, and subsequent detailed investigations into the legalities of sandmining. A motion to rezone large slices of former sandmining land to a less development-focussed zone was passed by Council and is currently being assessed by State Government.

So attempts are now being made to bring a halt to the years of neglect.

Kurnell is the Birthplace of Modern Australia, one of Kurnell's first historical turning points, which should automatically give it a proud and prominent place in Australia's history, but there are many aspects of its history, many being played out as we speak, that we should not feel so proud about.

If another book on Kurnell's post 20<sup>th</sup> Century history is published by a future Shire historian in 100 year's time, the question is what history will it have to describe? It is up to us to decide.

Simon Kimber-





## Who wants to be a . . . Friend of Towra?

The Friends of Towra are a group who, along with the Environment Centre, work to protect and conserve the important conservation values of Towra Point. This group was officially launched in February 1997, with the then NSW Minister for Environment, Pam Allan, attending.

The Friends of Towra volunteer group undertake work in the Reserve on at least one Saturday per month. Activities are varied and include bush regeneration, seed collection, vegetation surveys and habitat creation for the Little Tern. They also coordinate the annual Clean Up Australia Day activities at Towra

Since 1997, a lot has been achieved by volunteers in the Reserve especially in the area of weed eradication and bush regeneration. "We work, we learn, and

Between October and March volunteers assist National Parks and Wildlife Service in the management of Towra Spit Island as a breeding site for the Little Terns. Habitat management includes nest tagging, clearing nest areas and sangbagging.

They are always keen for more volunteer helpers and to find out more information about the Friends, including dates of work, contact National Parks and Wildlife Service on 9668 9111.



## web update

[ssec.org.au](http://ssec.org.au)

**Welcome to the first instalment of a regular article in our newsletters on the Centre's web activity.**

The last six months have been busy. In September 1999, the Centre received a grant from the NSW Heritage Office to construct a website on the history of the Kurnell Peninsula. Essentially what we have done in close collaboration with local historian Daphne Salt is to put the text and photos that Daphne had researched and collected for a book on Kurnell into a website. The website has comprehensive information on Aboriginal occupation, Captain Cook, Towra Point, sandhills and sand-mining, industrial intrusion, and a history of early enterprises and the Kurnell village.

The website was launched simultaneously with Daphne's book on the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Captain Cook's landing on 29 April 2000. You can visit the site at "<http://ssec.org.au/kurnell>". This pictorial history website is part one of a general Kurnell website. Later in the year we will be adding part two which will include other detailed information

about the Kurnell Peninsula. Indeed, planning and compiling of materials has already begun on this project.

In the last 2 months the Centre had also been successful in attracting a grant from the Hacking River Catchment Management Committee, just prior to its replacement with the new Catchment Management Board. The grant is to be used to construct a major website on the Hacking River Catchment. It is a joint project with the Port Hacking Protection Society which will see all additions of the *Protectorate* magazine also made available to the public on the Internet. Further details later

As with part 2 of the Kurnell website, we are currently researching and compiling information and designing the Hacking website but it should be up and running by the end of the year. Keep a look out in future *Web Updates* for news about its public release. By the end of 2000, the Centre's web presence will consist of 5 distinct websites which we anticipate will be accessed (in total) by upwards of 3000 people per month.

*Simon Kimberley*



### Bitter Nuclear Protests!

Federal Government's rush to impose a new larger reactor on Sutherland Shire is meeting strong opposition from our Shire Council, the Federal Opposition, the Democrats, Australian Conservation Foundation and many others. For information on this fast-moving scene (beyond the capacity of this newsletter to cover) contact People Against a Nuclear reactor 9545 3077, or Sutherland Council 9710 0333, and see Bob Walshe's article in the July issue of the newspaper, *Shire Life*.

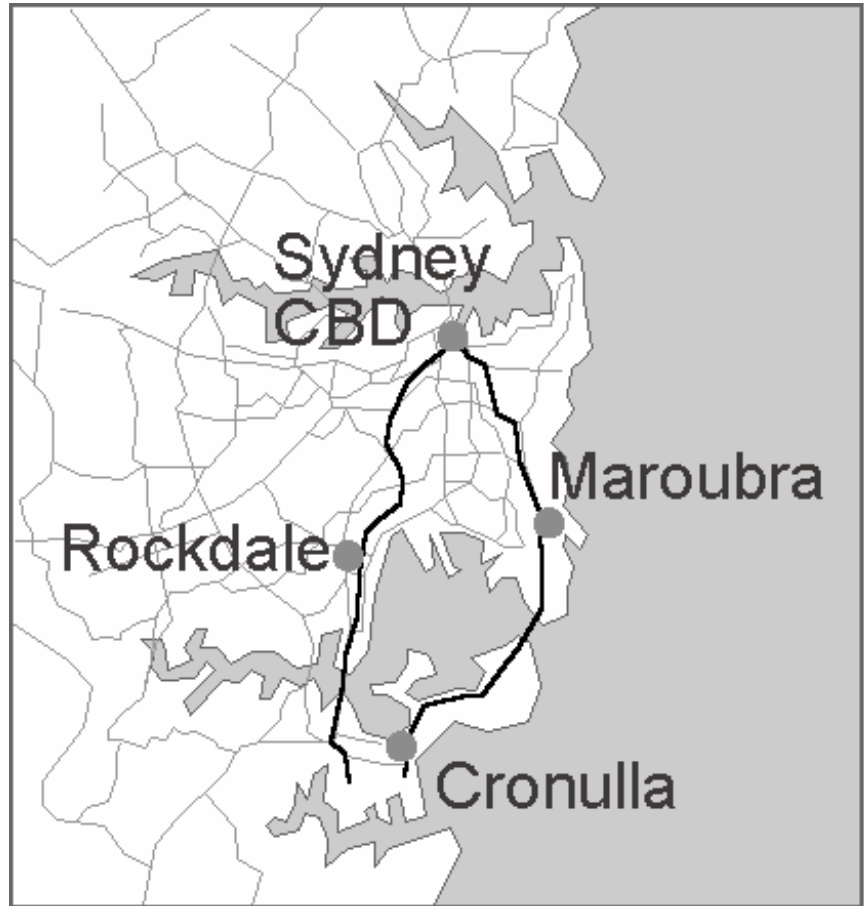
## The Bay Light Express

The campaign for greater emphasis on light rail in the Shire is gaining momentum.

Eco-Transit Sydney Inc, through former SSEC Director, Michelle Zeibots, have reworked and expanded a light rail proposal first developed by SSEC in 1996. Eco-Transit is a no profit organisation fighting for more and better public transport and against prolific private motor vehicle use, urban sprawl, air pollution and greenhouse gas generation. Its proposal would see a light rail loop established linking Miranda with the City via Rockdale, and Cronulla with the City via Maroubra. Many tram lines in the eastern suburbs were ripped up in the 1960s and the introduction of light rail in these areas would mark a return to more efficient forms of mass transit. For the Shire, it would provide an alternative to the heavy rail system especially for those commuters in the Cronulla area.

The Cronulla to City route would travel through Kurnell and be linked to the eastern suburbs via a tunnel under Botany Bay. It would significantly cut travel times to the City whilst providing better access to UNSW, Randwick Racecourse, Fox Studios and the SCG/Sydney Football Stadium from the Shire and the City.

The Miranda to City route would pro-



*Proposed route for the Bay Light Express*

vide an alternative to the F6 Freeway and would provide increasing numbers of people with new transport choices, thereby reducing car journeys and vehicle kilometres travelled in south-eastern Sydney. The benefits for air quality would be immeasurable. With links to the airport and King St Newtown, the route is likely to be attractive for non-commuter travellers as well.

Both light rail routes would also pro-

vide a much needed boost for tourism around Botany Bay.

You can find out more information about the Bay Light Express Campaign and how to get involved by visiting the Eco-Transit website <http://www.ecotransit.org.au> or write to PO Box 630, Milsons Point NSW 1565.

## in tribute...

*The Centre mourns the passing of the following friends, who each in their own way have contributed valuably to a better environment.*

**Bernice Silverstone** (sister of Jack Munday) who, with her sister Josie Munday, was a founding member, long-time friend and volunteer of the Centre.

**Barbara Shirley**, beloved wife of Don Shirley who made her home available for growing of plants, meetings and the mailout of many,

many newsletters on behalf of the Centre.

**Fay Sutton**, who was an inspiration to us all. She overcame great personal obstacles to make an outstanding contribution to the environment movement over three decades. Her tireless efforts for the Australian Conservation Founda-

tion (ACF), Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) and numerous other groups will be greatly missed.

**Judith Wright**, one of Australia's leading poets and activists. She will be remembered for her founding of the Queensland Wildlife Preservation Society and her successful battles against sand mining on Fraser Island and oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef.

**The news that's not well-known...**

## **A volunteers army is on the march!**

*By Bob Walsh*

"I'M EXCITED!" said the Mayor  
"I'm delighted!" said Jean and Joan and Dave and Don and –  
"We're all delighted," said the clapping hands of three hundred Shire residents come to Hazelhurst Arts Centre to see Shire citizens receive Volunteer Recognition Awards.

"The first-ever presentation of its kind," declared Mayor Ken McDonell. "And it won't be the last. We'll honour more of our volunteers next year – and please note that next year, 2001, is to be the United Nations' International Year of Volunteers. That tells you how important volunteering has become in the eyes of the whole modern world!"

## **Governments would collapse without them**

It's no exaggeration at all to say that modern governments can't handle the increasing demands that modern society is making on them.

In fact, governments everywhere are at a relative standstill, so often cutting services, selling public assets and devising new taxes that they face public dissatisfaction amid escalating change. But the societies they supposedly lead aren't waiting for them – they are joining or establishing NGOs, non-government organisations, which are mostly run by unpaid volunteers.

*Welcome to the Volunteers Army!* – and it's on the march worldwide, aiming to make human society better and kinder and less destructive of the earth than has been the case through the Greedy Eighties and the Nasty Nineties.

Already this army is massive. Could you ever have guessed that over 4 million Australians already volunteer time to non-profit organisations? "In New South Wales alone," says Mayor McDonell, "no fewer than 100,000 of such organisations depend on the help offered by 1.5 million volunteers."

Massive! And yet, still not enough, because the needy and their needs increase all the time. Take one area, that of the frail, the aged, the disabled; they require help with shopping, transport, day care, meal delivery, gardening and handy work, or simply outings, or visiting and spend-

ing-time-with.

That's only one needful area – think of the needs of the schools and hospitals, amateur sport and life saving, animal welfare and environmental protection, and much, much more. In the Shire, for instance, over a hundred bushcare groups work on weeding and regenerating local bushland, and over 850 bushfire prevention volunteers stand by, keeping their training and equipment in trim.

### **What is volunteering?**

In this army without uniforms or officers, the volunteers "enlist" by making an unpaid commitment of energy, time and skill in the not-for-profit sector, either to help others directly, face to face, or to help institutions that are seen to be helping others. (Philanthropy, donating to good causes, substitutes money for volunteering.)

### **Two sides to volunteering**

Broadly, volunteering has two sides, which at first seem opposed – a desire to help others and a desire to help oneself. The *first* is the Good Samaritan, who wishes to serve others, neither asking nor expecting to gain and probably even giving something materially in the process. The *second* is the Self Improver, who hopes that serving will bring a sense of meaning into his or her life, bring new friends, wider experience, and perhaps desired new skills. Too *self* concerned to be virtuous? No need here to assign degrees of virtue; in practice most volunteers are probably motivated by a mix of the two elements. So volunteering is about HELPING, whether for the betterment of others or one's own, or the mix.

### **Helping helps one's health.**

There's also this extraordinary news, which isn't nearly well enough known, though it should be shouted from the housetops: WHEN YOU HELP OTHERS YOU HELP YOUR OWN HEALTH.

The Tecumseh Community Health Study of 3000 adults, across a decade, concluded that those who helped others lived longer themselves – that regular volunteering ranked among the most powerful predictors of reduced mortality rates.

How to account for this? A famous experiment by psychologist Bernard Rimland found that happy people are generous people, who spend as much time focusing on the happiness of others as on their own. This is supported from an unlikely source: Tachi Kiuchi, boss of Mitsubishi Electric Corporation, says, "None of us is whole. We need each other to fill our

gaps". Volunteering is a prime way to fill those gaps.

## **Volunteering in Sutherland Shire**

How does volunteering in the Shire compare with elsewhere? Statistics are hard to come by, but observers think we're above average.

A councillor says, "There are over 900 community organisations in the Shire. If we moderately estimate an average of 40 volunteers in each, then that's getting on towards 40,000 who are regularly contributing to the wellbeing of others – in other words, about one-in-four of the adult population." Which is certainly above the one-in-five national average reported for 1995 (*SMH*, 16.4.96).

"You'll find the volunteers in school and childcare activities, health and aged care, precinct committees, bushcare groups, environmental protection, bushfire and other emergency services, management committees of community organisations, neighbourhood watch and safety house schemes, arts and crafts groups, the secretaries and coaches and referees of sporting clubs, and – stop! The list could go on and on."

No wonder John Ross of the Volunteer Centre of NSW speaks of "the enormous value of volunteers to society... worth billions of dollars". He says, "Our society would be unrecognisable if they weren't there!"

No doubt the Shire next May will mark the UN's International Year of Volunteers with a bumper handing out of Volunteers Awards for veterans – and, no less, a warm welcome to newly enlisted members, young and old, of that informal volunteers army



*Michael Priceman, one of about 13 Centre volunteers recognised by the Mayor at a recent Council event*