

By Vicki Simpson

No, it's not Clean-up Australia Day today on Wanda Beach—it's just an ordinary Sunday morning. And walking towards me along the beach come three young people - Vita, David and Albie as I later find out - carrying rubbish they had collected along their way. They had simply gone for an early morning beach walk 'to enjoy the fresh air' after coming from Surry Hills to visit friends in Cronulla. In recent months I have also encountered a man and a woman who regularly walk this same stretch of beach north of Wanda collecting rubbish. I am at once delighted, amazed and humbled that such people still exist in our world!

This reminds me of a Special Report paper published by the Central Coast Community Environment Network in January 2002, entitled *Is a Clean Beach a Lifeless Beach?*

Hand cleaning v. machine cleaning

It tells of one John Harrison,

Beach Cleaners *Hand or Machine?*



David, Albie and Vita picking up rubbish at Wanda beach.

who has walked Umina and Ocean beaches on the Central Coast every day for the past fifteen years collecting rubbish, and of his observations and recordings over that period.

In just one recent year he collected over 75,000 pieces of litter and over 3,000 bottles and cans (weighing over 3 tonnes) -

(Continued on page 3)

Pouring Iodine on a nuclear disaster

By Michael Priceman

People Against a New Reactor (PANR) recently launched its Stable Iodine Campaign. The aim is to persuade the NSW Government that its plans to counter the effects of a worst-case (sabotage) accident at Lucas Heights are a health hazard. A key issue is that ANSTO's release of *radioactive Iodine¹³¹* can cause serious effects on the human thyroid gland. Most at risk are infants and unborn children.

To protect the thyroid gland it is necessary to take *stable iodine*

that 'blocks' the gland and minimises dangerous effects on health. Even so, timing is of the essence. If taken within one hour of the release, the stable iodine can be 85% effective; but there is a rapid reduction in effectiveness if delayed. Ideally, if it was thought that a release of radioactivity were imminent, the stable iodine should be taken immediately to have full effect.

Whilst the State Emergency Services store supplies at ambulance stations around the reactor site, it has become evident that they would not be able to issue them to the public within a time scale that would

make them effective. The obvious way to prevent and protect would be for the Iodine tablets to be distributed in advance to each household within a specified area, say 5km. And to stockpile a supply in case a wider area is affected.

Unfortunately it is not possible to obtain Iodine tablets from a local chemist, even with a doctor's prescription. We are therefore asking the local community to call on Premier Bob Carr to support their distribution and do it quickly. A very small ask indeed.

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From the Chair

By Miriam Verbeek, Chair of
Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

It was the following quote that finally persuaded me that I needed to down tools and march on Sunday, 11 February 2003 – along with 250,000 others!

"Naturally the common people don't want war, neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are going to be attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country."

Hitler's Field Marshal Hermann Goering apparently spoke those words at the Nuremberg trial, which sentenced him to execution in 1946.

The person who sent me this quote also wrote: "As has been said elsewhere, 'For evil to triumph, it only needs good people to do nothing.'"

I asked my children if they wanted to come along and they looked distressed. "But we want to go skateboarding!" they pleaded. And I thought that was right. How lucky we are that our children have the freedom to enjoy their childhood. And I wish that all children on this overcrowded planet of ours had that privilege.

So I added my body to the tens of thousands of others, meeting strangers and friends, most, if not all, moved by the wish to prevent something that would precipitate an unpredictable chain of events.

It is hard, when the threat of war crowds the airways, to continue about "business as usual" – especially when terror fridge magnets and brochures are slotted into the mailbox. But there you are, there is nothing but to continue as if business is as usual.

For the Environment Centre "usual" continues to be a mixture of campaigns, projects and programs.

I'd like to draw your attention particularly to the transport campaign ably led over the past few years by Michelle Zeibots. She has been responsible for educating many of us on the intricacies of Transport Planning.

As we've reported in previous newsletters, the Centre's campaign, partnering with the hard-working CARTS (Citizens Advocating Responsible Transport for the Shire) has persuaded the Minister for Transport to abandon the F6 and begin a study on alternative uses for the F6 corridor. Together with five Councils in the Southern Sector, the Centre has also persuaded the Department of Transport to set up a Forum to develop a strategic plan for the Southern Sydney Region. The first meeting of the Forum took place on 27 February.

As a third prong to our transport work, we have also developed a "People's Transport Vision." We put together the first draft of that vision document at the beginning of the year. Other groups and individuals have since commented on it and we have redrafted it to include their ideas. We are now releasing it to the public for further comment and for endorsement. You'll find more details about this campaign on pages 4-5 of this newsletter.

It is very important that we obtain widespread community endorsement for this vision statement. Please take the time to read it and to send a letter to us supporting the vision (with comment if you wish).

We will give the vision and letters of endorsement to the Minister before the election in March. It will also be sent to federal government representatives, and copies will be lodged with all councils in the sector.

The lack of a good transport planning in Sydney carries much inconvenience. It is bad for the health of the environment. By delivering a "vision statement" from the people, we hope to make it quite clear to state and federal governments that the hard decisions need to be made and a strategy needs to be implemented.

As I marched on Sunday, it did occur to me that the march and the transport vision statement have something in common. They are both trying to send a message from the people to "our leaders" who are at times rather deafened by their own political ambitions and in-fighting.



About SSEC

The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre was founded to speak for the environment of the Sutherland Shire and its bioregions. The Centre seeks to bring to its advocacy role: well-researched information, participation of all stakeholders in debates; inclusion of the needs of future generations; and a genuine desire to seek win-win solutions to competing aims for the utilisation of natural resources. Officially launched on 22 July 1991, the Centre is a totally independent body, open at all times to public scrutiny and public participation. This newsletter is provided to members and interested readers to sup-

ply up-to-date information about Centre activities. Opinions expressed in the newsletter are the authors', and not necessarily policy of the Centre.

The editorial committee comprises: Pam Cook, Don Pagé, Vicki Simpson, Narelle Towart Miriam Verbeek, and Jo Winkler.



Volunteer Joan Flowers hard at work.



Contact us:

*Sutherland Shire
Environment Centre
Suite 4, Level 1,
2-4 Merton St,
Sutherland
PO Box 589,
Sutherland NSW 1499
Ph: 02 9545 3077
Fax: 02 9521 1477
office@ssec.org.au
Web www.ssec.org.au*

Beach Cleaners—Hand or Machine?

(Continued from page 1)

all from littering and the careless disposal of waste. Apparently over 80% of this litter arrives on the tide twice daily and from storm-water drains, local rivers and boats.

John also studied the effectiveness/effects of the use of beach cleaning machines. He found that it appears to do extensive ecological damage by disturbing sands on the beach. This damages the intertidal zone, causing death of small insects, worms and crustaceans which form part of the food chain for birds and fish; it removes sea grass and sand needed for dune formation, causing beach erosion; it breaks the crust formed on the beach adding to wind-blown sand loss; and it greatly discourages bird life on the beaches.

As well, John found it would be much more cost effective to employ beach walkers to hand clean the beaches daily rather than use the expensive beach machines. This would also result in more thorough cleaning - removing dangerous objects, etc. - as the machines have been found to really only make the beaches 'look better until the next high tide'.

Our Shire's Beaches

Our main Sutherland Shire beaches - Cronulla to Wanda - are machine cleaned (with tractor and beach rake) approximately four times a week between September and April, with Kurnell Beach and the beach north of Wanda to the 4WD park being cleaned usually once a week.

The rubbish, which also includes a lot of sand, is emptied into a large, open skip bin at the Wanda Depot behind Wanda carpark, which is then removed when full. Unfortunately, this rubbish is not sorted for recycling, and much of it blows all around the immediate vicinity of the park at the back of the beach.

Perhaps our Council should consider employing the likes of our early morning Wanda Beach walkers on a paid basis for a better ecological and economic beach

cleaning outcome.

The full special report of CCCEN can be found in our SSEC library.



Pouring Iodine on a nuclear disaster

(Continued from page 1)

It must be pointed out that such minimum protection applies only to one radioisotope. There is no protection against any of the many others.

Please contact the Premier before the upcoming State election and ask for his urgent support. Remind him that it is the NSW State Government that has all the responsibility for dealing with the off-site effects of a nuclear accident at Lucas Heights even though the site and the operation is owned by the Commonwealth.

The contact details are: Premier Bob Carr MP, Level 40 Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney NSW 2000 or send an email to: bob.carr@www.nsw.gov.au

What might the effects of a worst-case accident be?

This is an ongoing controversial subject. It

ranges from the ridiculously optimistic to the (fearfully) pessimistic. ANSTO is insistent in its claim that harmful radiation could not pass beyond its 1.6 km exclusion zone. Yet ARPANSA, the Commonwealth nuclear regulator, was quoted in the St George Leader, March 2002, as saying that it could have an effect up to 50 km.

Dr John Loy, the ARPANSA CEO, at a Senate Hearing 20th February 2002, declared:

“The energy of the fire would cause the radioactive cloud, if you like, to rise up, to be quite buoyant and then to spread, such that it would be quite dispersed. The doses to any individual would be relatively small, but they would occur at some distance from the facility. There would certainly be no instant fatalities; a number of persons would receive a dose which would increase the risk of a fatal cancer in due course.”

An independent study commissioned by

Sutherland Council suggested a figure of up to 80 km—so you will understand the confusion!

ARPANSA could help both the community and the State Emergency Services if it made public the *Analysis of the Effects of a Worst-case Accident* that was prepared by ANSTO during its application for a construction licence. It denied this to us for over 15 months on the grounds of security but has promised a (sanitised) version 'soon'. This has been delayed because of the excessive workload of its staff. Such reluctance to provide adequate and timely information has been a feature of the nuclear regulator that cannot be seen as carrying out its legislated function of 'protecting the public from the harmful effects of radiation'.

If you want to learn more or get active in the campaign, please contact PANR Email panr@acay.com.au or write to PANR PO Box 595 Sutherland NSW 1499

Sharks twice as big as Meriton monster

By Bob Walshe

The giant crane currently waiting high above Caringbah shopping centre announced Meriton's "Gateway" development in progress.

"Staggering", "gigantic", "monstrous" are the adjectives that spring to the lips of people moving down the Kingsway. And, "Why did Council allow this—it's such obvious overdevelopment?"

It was apparently sanctioned by the previous (1995-99) Council, whereas

councillors in the present Council say they are moving strongly to prevent overdevelopment.

Yet some of these councillors, while deploring "overdevelopment" in Caringbah, seem prepared to turn a blind eye to overdevelopment at Woollooware/Kurnell. The Sharks football Club is pushing Sutherland Council to agree to a proposal to erect 210 residential units, a 60-suite hotel, and other facilities on the Club's parking area, at the edge of sensitive Woollooware Bay.

"This will be more than twice the size (floorspace) of the huge Meriton development," says a representative of the community groups in Kurnell Regional Environment Planning Council. "If approved by Council, it will create a precedent for massive residential development on the Kurnell Peninsula—an environmental disaster, an overdevelopment travesty!"

For all the details of the Sharks development proposal, go to www.ssec.org.au/SharkFeb03

Please comment on and endorse the People's Transport Vision below.

The Environment Centre and EcoTransit Sydney have released a transport vision for the Southern Sydney Sector (the area including Wollongong, Sutherland, Hurstville, Kogarah and Rockdale).

The Vision identifies major elements of a Transport Network for the sector, elements that should be specified in a transport plan for the area. Please read the summary statement in this newsletter. Log on to the Environment Centre's website (www.ssec.org.au) to read the full supporting document, or call in to the Centre for a hard copy, or ring to have one faxed or mailed to you.

The final, endorsed document will be presented to councils and the State and Federal government before the State election on March 22. Please send in your letter or email of endorsement. It need be no more than a few lines saying you agree with the vision and urge the government to immediately begin the process of preparing a strategy for its implementation.

Send letter to: People's Transport Vision
Sutherland Shire Environment Centre
PO Box 589
SUTHERLAND NSW 1499
Ph: 9545 3077

Or send an email to: office@ssec.org.au

A People's vision for transport and access

Southern Sector, Sydney-Wollongong Region

The vision

We, the people of the southern sector of the Sydney-Wollongong region have a vision of:

an access and transport system that ensures economic security, is ecologically sustainable, equitable, maintains the aesthetic characteristics of neighbourhoods and encourages a healthy life style.

We urge federal, state and local governments to work together with private transport providers and community representatives to design a comprehensive transport and access strategy that delivers the vision.

Such a strategy should be formulated over the next twelve months with the aim to deliver the comprehensive transport network within two decades.

We believe that such a strategy is essential in the face of Sydney's continued population growth, the state government's urban consolidation policy, the health impacts and reduced urban amenity caused by the current dominance of car-based life styles, the economic dangers of continued reliance on high fossil fuel consumption, and the inequities built into current access modes.

The strategy should contain the following elements:

- **Upgrade of existing heavy rail infrastructure.**
- **Plans for construction of new rail lines on major trunk routes.**
- **Increased frequency of public transport availability.**
- **Integrated fares, ticketing and information systems for the whole public transport network.**
- **Design of roads and intersections to give priority access to buses.**
- **Provision of an integrated network of safe bicycle and pedestrian routes.**
- **Increased facilities for bicycles at major centres and on public transport.**
- **Integrated urban planning.**
- **Secure funding for the continued upgrading and maintenance of public transport systems.**
- **Action to end built-in subsidies for road transport.**

We do not dictate the details of the strategy that should be formulated to provide the people's vision. Details will depend on the innovative nature of solutions, technology and resources. However, a multi-modal system must be part of a comprehensive transport infrastructure.

We urge all levels of government, and private transport providers to work together with the community to formulate the strategy. As is clearly recognised in Agenda 21, producing sustainable outcomes occurs best when partnerships between government, business and the community are strong and transparent.

Our vision highlights that the underlying motivation for developing transport systems should be to improve access rather than simply providing transport for its own sake.

We believe that Federal, State and Local Governments should resource this vision in a sustained way, and work towards reviewing those urban and social development factors that continue to give preference to road-based transport.

Counter-productive and obsolete: latest figures on M5East Motorway paint a grim picture of motorway building

By Michelle Zeibots

The latest RTA traffic volumes for the M5East are now available, confirming many people's worst fears. Vehicle numbers jumped by a whopping 16 per cent in the year after opening. For the three major roads to the north (Princes Hwy, Marsh Street and General Holmes Drive) volumes jumped from around 200,000 to 240,000. This is in stark contrast to usual growth rates for these roads which stand at around one to two per cent per year.

Coinciding with this big increase in road traffic is a big decline in rail passengers on the East Hills rail line. Losses were in

the realm of 2,000 to 2,500 per day or 8 per cent.

The exit point from the M5 at General Holmes Drive is now operating at capacity, so no more traffic can get on the motorway. It is expected that other arterial roads that saw declines in traffic as motorists shifted to the M5 will now see volumes grow to levels prior to the M5 opening. Some of this big jump in traffic is people making new and additional trips. The increase isn't known precisely at this stage, but we'll keep everyone posted on the results.

But whatever the precise findings are, we

in the Shire are lucky that we won't have to go through the same. An M6 Motorway would pull thousands of commuters off the heavily overcrowded Illawarra rail services and onto our roads. It makes more sense to invest the billion or so dollars it would take to build a motorway on increasing the capacity of our public transport network.



Menai Matters

By Miriam Verbeek

The Environment Centre continues to be involved with developments in Menai.

Part of the endangered transition forest at Allison Crescent in Menai has been stripped of its vegetation to build an indoor sporting complex. Unfortunately, drought conditions meant that not as many plants as Council's Bushcare had hoped to transplant could be moved successfully. Nevertheless, quite a number of plants have been



The site of the indoor sporting complex at Menai

transplanted to other previously disturbed patches of the forest. In addition, the developers have mulched all the vegetation they uprooted. This mulch with, hopefully, a rich seed bank, has been spread by

Bushcare contractors around the fringes of the transition forest and on bare areas.

A temporary fence has been erected around the bushland and Council has started work on a permanent one. This promised permanent fence was supposed to be in before works started on the indoor sporting complex but Council acted too late and materials were not ordered on time.

Council is providing the Environment Centre with a program of building works and other news. Please check the Centre's website for the latest information (www.ssec.org.au).

Another troublesome development is the Menai Central retail complex on Old Illawarra Road. A court order stipulated a number of conditions to be observed by the developers, such as low pole lighting, sound barriers, gardens around the perimeter of the development, limited delivery times, and severely restricted access to Carter Road. These conditions have been ordered to preserve the residential amenity of the neighbourhood.

Residents argue that a number of conditions have not been observed. Acting as a mediator, the Centre has brought these concerns to Council and the developer, and many of them are being resolved.

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.ssec.org.au/SharkFeb03

For all the details of the Sharks Football Club's development proposal (article on page 3).

www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities

Cool Communities (article on page 6).

www.seda.nsw.gov.au

Sustainable Energy Development Authority (article on page 6).

www.biobag.com.au

Totally Biodegradable Plastic Bags (article on page 8).

www.nccnsw.org.au

Nature Conservation Council of NSW (Bushfire article on page 7).



Focus on Renewable Energy Sources

By Josephine Winkler

With Australia experiencing its worst drought on record, questions are being asked: "How did it come to this?" and, "What can be done to remedy the situation?"

A study released on 14 January 2003 by WWF Australia, "Global Warming Contributes to Australia's Worst Drought," investigates links between the drought and global warming. The 2002-03 drought is compared with the four other major droughts in the country since 1950. It emerges that significantly higher temperatures in 2002 gave the current drought a greater severity than any other since 1950.

The effects of the drought have been both physical and economic. Physically, higher temperatures and drier conditions have created greater bushfire danger than in previous droughts (Canberra and the Alpine regions of south-eastern Australia bear stark witness to this), high evaporation rates have made it difficult to sow crops, and water has disappeared from rivers and reservoirs – Warragamba Dam is at 60% capacity. Economically, low crop yields will lead to lower export earnings in 2002-03.



Effects of the drought have been devastating.

The report points the finger squarely at human-induced global warming as a key factor in the severity of the current drought. The actual trend in Australian temperatures since 1950 now appears to be matching the climate models of how temperatures respond to increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. *See graph.*

Australians are the highest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases in the developed world. Energy use – burning fossil fuels, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere – is the dominant source of

greenhouse gas emissions in Australia, contributing 55% of the nation's total

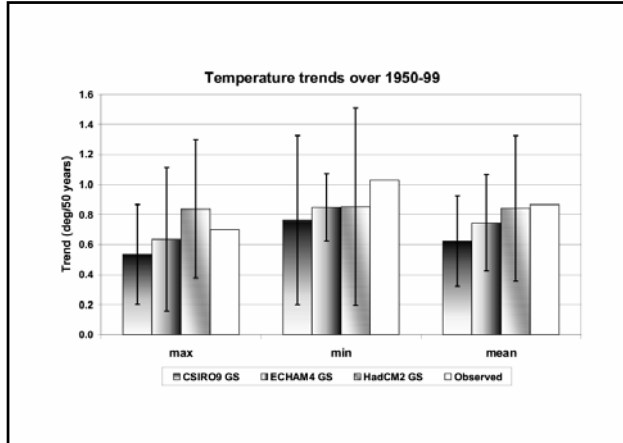


Figure 1 Australian temperatures are now matching the global warming models

emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions will rise as Australia's population increases.

With the US preparing to do battle with Iraq for control of Iraq's oil reserves, and with Australia's current drought crisis, *now* is the time to be instigating widespread use of clean and sustainable energy sources.

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is turning to social science in its quest to steer the world towards greener lifestyles. Consultation with psychologists and behavioural scientists, will enable UNEP to use their marketing skills to enlist public support in reducing pollution.

Apparently, the good old-fashioned method of inducing guilt about lifestyle choices just isn't working. Sustainable living must be something that people desire for the current situation to be turned around. UNEP believes that financial incentives might achieve what guilt can not. For example, one car manufacturer in the UK is giving away a mountain bike with every car it sells, urging buyers to use the bike for short journeys.

However, financial incentives will only go so far.

Effective environmental education is the key. John Harris from the Energy Friendly Homes Cool Community in Launceston says, "If you show people they can make a

difference they will".

Cool Communities – a Federal Government initiative – is providing information, support and financial assistance to selected communities to undertake easy practical actions to achieve a

reduction of household greenhouse gas emissions. To find out more, visit the website www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities

This year, the Environment Centre is supporting Solar Month, April 2003. Solar Month is organised by the Sustainable Energy Development

Authority (SEDA), and is a program of events run by industry, government,

schools and community groups with the aim of increasing the number of educated, aware solar advocates to help reach the potential market for renewable technologies. For more information about Solar Month and SEDA, go to www.seda.nsw.gov.au.

The Environment Centre's extensive environmental resource library has a wealth of information available on greenhouse issues, renewable energy technologies and 'green-living' suggestions. **Please call Becky or Jo if you want further information about UNEP, Cool Communities or SEDA and Solar Month.**

SSEC FUNDRAISING— WE NEED YOUR HELP!

We need volunteers for our monthly fundraising stalls! Stalls are held one Saturday per month, and volunteers are organised on a rotary basis (i.e. you wouldn't be required for every month). If you would like to lend a hand, please phone Ruth Zeibots on (02) 9543 1857.

We are always in need of good-quality bric-a-brac for the stalls. We are not looking for any more books, however, plants, cakes, etc. would be most welcome. Please contact the SSEC office on 9545 3077 to arrange a time to deliver to the Centre.



IF I HAD MY DRUTHERS...

By Gordon Hocking

Of all the considerations we examine when making choices, either as individuals or as a society, one stands out as deserving special prominence: "Is this action/plan 'sustainable'?" That is, "will this activity or plan have long-term benefits and cause no environmental/social/economic long-term harm?" But the word "sustainable" has, in recent years, been misappropriated: even

"growth" is routinely referred to as "sustainable growth" - a mathematical impossibility.

Sustainable actions do not reduce natural capital and also satisfy the requirements of fairness (equity) within both today's generation and future generations. In Australia, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (May 1992) requires all environmental policy-making and program implementation to be informed by the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The definition for ecologically sustainable

development adopted by the commonwealth government states:

"Ecologically sustainable development means using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased."

In 2003, incalculable good could come from restoring the true meaning of the word "sustainable". Restored, the word should be used accurately and sparingly.

ACTION

Bushfire controls cause concern

The Centre received the following message from the Nature Conservation Council..

NCC (Nature Conservation Council) would like to bring to the attention of all conservationists in NSW **serious concerns** relating to proposed Bush Fire Environment Code (BEC), the draft framework for streamlined environmental assessment for hazard reduction.

The RFS is proposing to do a desktop environmental assessment, without a good knowledge of threatened species or their responses to fire, without sound knowledge of fire history, AND potentially to be conducted by someone without environmental qualifications!! Of even more concern is the lack of clarity concerning the extent of lands to be subject to this new and less rigorous form of environmental assessment!

Please write to Minister Debus expressing your concern about the inadequacy of their proposal:

Hon R. J. Debus MP
Minister for Emergency Services,
Minister for the Environment
Level 25, 59-61 Goulburn Street
Sydney 2000

For more details on this issue, please call **Andrew Stanton** Bushfire Management Project Officer at NCC on 02 9279 2120 www.nccnsw.org.au or the Environment Centre on 02 9545 3077

Building Community Capacity for Ecological Sustainability

On February 7, Jo Winkler and Jim Sloan took part in the launch of the NSW Environmental Education Plan Learning for Sustainability.

The plan's vision is to achieve "Effective and integrated environmental education which builds the capacity of the people of NSW to be informed and active participants in moving society towards sustainability". It complements the Southern Catchment Management Board's Blueprint target

which aims to provide programs to "enhance genuine community engagement in all aspects of natural resource management, from planning to on-ground actions".

The Centre is taking active steps to implement the sustainability programs by:

- extending the Centre's website to be interactive and provide more information;
- creating environmental issues education kits for teachers to integrate with their teach-

ing plans;

- becoming a directory for local and general environment-related issues; and
- making our resource library more widely accessible.

For more information on "Learning for Sustainability", the Catchment Management Blueprint, or the Centre's programs, please call in and see us.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION :

I would like to become a member of Sutherland Shire Environment Centre



Sutherland Shire Environment Centre
Suite 4, Level 1,
2-4 Merton St, Sutherland
PO Box 589, Sutherland NSW 1499
Telephone 02 9545 3077
Fax 02 9521 1477
Email office@ssec.org.au
Web <http://ssec.org.au>

Name.....

Address.....

..... post-

code.....Telephone.....

I enclose fee of: \$27.50 (1 yr) \$49.50 (2 yr) \$66 (3 yr)

\$16.50 (concession or student)

Signed.....Date.....

Sylvania Heights Public School Cares!

By Pam Cook

At Sylvania Heights Public School the new logo for the school environment team is "WE CARE" and it's easy to see why! The school is actively involved in environmental education at a hands-on level.

Every Thursday a group of about a dozen dedicated students meet with Mrs Greenaway, the School Librarian and teacher in charge of environmental education, to clean and green the school grounds.

Their efforts over the last couple of years have raised the profile of green issues in the school and inspired fellow students to take more care with their gardens and playground. Some beautiful native gardens have been constructed, including the "Whispering Garden" which provides both a windbreak and a passive recreational

area for students with its whispering Casuarina trees.

"We consulted Bushcare and the local native plant society to find out what plants are indigenous to this area," says Mrs Greenaway. "We actually have remnant vegetation of Red Mahogany which is now quite rare around here."

In addition to the gardening program the school recycles paper and cardboard and is currently developing and implementing a whole-school environment plan. At the end of 2002 students carried out a waste audit and are now looking at ways of reducing the amount of waste created in the school. Water and power usage are also being studied.

On a wider scale, students in Stage Three, who are studying Rainforests this term,

will be linking up with other schools in the Shire to create websites containing discussion and information on endangered areas and species. According to Mrs Greenaway the school environment is definitely changing for the better. "We're seeing a lot more parrots in the gardens and the students are becoming a lot more aware of their responsibility to care for their world. We hope in the future to plant some native species that WIRES will be able to use to feed orphaned and injured native animals."

Congratulations to the students and staff at Sylvania Heights on their continuing commitment to Environmental Ed. They're a perfect example of what it means to "Think Globally, Act Locally".

How to make a plastic bag disappear

By Miriam Verbeek

Some of you may have missed this interesting item of news in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 17 February 2003.

A company called Biopac has worked with the giant British supermarket chain Sainsbury's to invent a biodegradable plastic bag. The bag will be introduced into the 323 Sainsbury outlets in April this year.

The bag is composed of 30 per cent vegetable starch. The rest is the usual

petrochemicals used in making polyethylene bags. The starch gives bacteria food. Once the bacteria start eating, they get strong enough to dissolve the plastic as well. It takes about a month for the whole bag to disappear as water vapour.

According to the *Herald* report, a Sainsbury spokesman said the bag would not dissolve in the rain and could be re-used—

"unless you leave it in a dark corner with jam roly-poly in it to attract bugs".

Locally, the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* reported in November last year, that two Gynea retailers, Wrights selected meats and Jackson's Pharmacy, are using biodegradable plastic bags. These bags are manufactured and distributed by Valpac Australia and use a biodegradable film.

For Bio Bags details, visit www.biobag.com.au



Sutherland Shire Environment Centre
Suite 4, Level 1,
2-4 Merton St, Sutherland
PO Box 589, Sutherland NSW 1499



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