



2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Sutherland Shire
Environment Centre



About SSEC

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre is actively involved with local community organisations, businesses, government, and residents on a wide range of projects to protect, improve and maintain the natural beauty and character of our Shire, its bioregions, surrounding waterways and parks. We promote sustainability, support environmental education, and welcome community involvement to help us address environmental issues.

SSEC is a totally independent, non-government community organisation. It is an incorporated Association guided by a constitution and governed by a Board elected at an Annual General Meeting by members of the Association.

<https://www.ssec.org.au/>

The SSEC Board

Chair
Ian Hill

Board Members

Lily Meier (Treasurer)

Scott Dovey

Grant Kirk

Cooper Riach

Ross Jeffree

Phil Smith (Secretary)

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Statement of Functions

The Board agrees that the following list comprises the priority functions of the SSEC:

1. Establish the SSEC as the Peak Environment Group in the Sutherland Shire and its bio-regions, one that supports low-impact lifestyles, practices and behaviours in the community.
2. Establish efficient communication processes with the community.
3. Develop and conduct education initiatives.
4. Campaign publicly for protecting and improving the quality of the environment in Sutherland and its bio-regions.
5. Support members and local community organisations in their efforts to protect their local areas.
6. Establish efficient information, operation and management systems for Sutherland Shire Environment Centre.
7. Strengthen relationships with Sutherland Shire Council, other councils and other community and environmental organisations.
8. Raise funds to carry out the functions of Sutherland Shire Environment Centre.

For all of the above, the principles of working in partnership with others and in concert with other initiatives apply. Consultation and collaboration are vital elements of effective partnerships. The overall aim is to create an Environment Centre! One that is welcoming and useful for the community and one that models and demonstrates environmental and sustainability values in its decisions, practices and actions.

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Report from the Chair

As Chair I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands of the Sutherland Shire, the Dharawal and Gandangara, and pay respect to the Elders past, present and emerging.

Since the last AGM in September 2022 the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) has continued to promote the needs of the environment in the Sutherland Shire and adjacent areas.

SSEC ACHIEVEMENTS

SSEC has achieved many environmental outcomes through a range of activities and has maintained membership near 100 for the year. As an overview the achievements come through campaigns, advocacy through social media and submissions, the staging of events and through grant funding to local environment projects.

CAMPAIGNS

Two prominent campaigns are firstly the twin campaigns of the Coal Waste Pollution in the Royal National Park Campaign, Coal Mining Under Woronora Reservoir and secondly the Koala campaign. Both of these are led by Catherine Reynolds and for the Koala Campaign, John Souvleris has recently joined as co-convenor.

The Environment Education campaign is multifaceted affair led by Phil Smith and provides the most popular page on the SSEC website. It is made up of the Bob Walshe “Writing for the Environment Award” and the “Speaking for the Planet” which is an arts-based competition for children focused on environmental themes. Both are assessed by Phil Smith and a panel of judges.

Scott Dovey has initiated the Clean Energy Campaign with Electrify Bundeena.

ShireCAN progresses the climate action response has a growing presence within the community at markets and festivals and expos and is led by Gay Curtis. ShireCAN collaborated with Sutherland Shire Council and Bicycle NSW to advocate for an acceptable route for the Sutherland to Cronulla

Active Transport Link (SCATL) and has joined with them in actions to establish the Cronulla to Sutherland Bike link.

Sustainable Organisations of the Sutherland Shire (SO Shire & Plastic Free Shire) was led by Sarah Jo-Lobwein who has received many plaudits this year, as well as grants and awards, including for a new project called “Marine Biodiversity of Southern Sydney”. This project will use eDNA surveys along with photographic evidence to study the range of common, rare, migratory and endangered marine species at certain sites.

Other campaigns previously active require motivated leaders to step in and become active again including Shire Birds and Greening the Shire.

All these campaigns are run by volunteers who provide great amounts of time and dedication to their function and deserve great credit. Further details and achievements of these campaigns are to be found in the Campaigns section of the Annual Report.

So SSEC has continued its long running campaigns and established a potentially significant one.

ADVOCACY

SSEC addresses an extensive range of environmental issues impacting Sutherland Shire and the broader Sydney region on an ongoing basis. It raises awareness of issues using social media with its Facebook page, Twitter feed and its website.

The SSEC Facebook page has achieved very high standards of presentation and content achieving almost 4,200 followers and has provided a centre piece of information and excellence in the community for environmental topics. It covers raising awareness of issues, raising concerns where

Environmental Education

Greening the Shire

Shire Climate Action Network

(Over)Development – Save Our Shire



appropriate, providing current information on the status of issues, promoting upcoming events, celebrating environmental achievements and providing a voice for the environment.

Our Twitter followers have grown from around 340 to just under 500 and the webpage is vibrant user friendly and informative.

EVENTS

SSEC has staged a number of events since the last AGM. These included in 2022 a Picnic for Nature, a hugely successful booked out Coal Sludge Pollution Forum with Ian Wright and Sue Higginson at

Hazelhurst Arts gallery, a bird watching tour and the Annual Christmas Gathering.

On the 27th February 2023 SSEC and the Nature Conservation Council co-hosted the Heathcote Candidates Forum via zoom.

Sarah-Jo Lobwein held a number of successful beach clean-ups, separately and in conjunction with Cronulla Rotary.

In April, SSEC participated in the Greater Sydney Land Care Koalas Forum and then held a Members Meeting in June. This was followed in July by another hugely successful event which was the

screening of the Bob Brown film 'The Giants' at Audley Dance Hall with 120 people attending.

In August at the Audley Dance Hall SSEC held the event 'A focus on Koalas' and in late August launched a Streamwatch program in the Hacking River at Red Cedar Flat with aided by Greater Sydney Landcare. More recently SSEC staged the Electrify Bundeena launch at the Bundeena Community Centre on 10th September.

A possum dray making workshop was held at the beautiful Bundeena House. This was organised by SSEC members Catherine Reynolds, Annabel and Sue McTaggart.

A Streamwatch program was begun in the Hacking River on the back of assistance from Greater Sydney Landcare and will be led by Diana Smit who originated the concept.

RALLIES

SSEC members attended the World Environment Day rally with the SSEC banner in June 2023 and inspired by the 'The Giants' screening they attended the Bob Brown Rally for Nature at Marrickville in August.

SUBMISSIONS

SSEC has made six submissions since the last AGM which can be seen in the SSEC website under Submissions and Resources. Of note were two submissions to the EPA regarding the coal sludge spills into Camp Gully Creek and then the Hacking River from Metropolitan Colliery.

LEAF

Local Environment of Australia Funding (LEAF) is a grants program established thanks to the generosity and foresight of the SSEC founder Bob Walshe. It aims to support individuals or groups with environmental projects that benefit the Sutherland Shire and surrounding regions.

A significant project funded by LEAF was for Shannon Kaiser who is at Macquarie University is completing his PhD studying the impacts of pollutants on Australian Aquatic ecosystems and in doing so investigated possible impacts on the native frog populations in the Hacking River and Camp Gully Creek. ,

Other funding went to SO Shire for the Screening of the Envoy Film Australian Shark Cull at Hazelhurst Gallery, to print brochures for the Peabody mine pollution in the Hacking, to Lucas Heights Community School for the purchase a hive of stingless native bees, to ShireCan for publication of ShireCAN current campaigns for stall hire at the Gynea Village Fair, to Keiran Tapsell for Banksia Bush Care at Stanwell Park, and for Koala signs along Heathcote Road.

MERTON STREET

SSEC owns a commercial property at Merton Street which has historically produced a revenue stream enabling amongst other expenses, the employment of a staff member. The onset of Covid 19 led to the existing tenant negotiating a rent reduction but as the pandemic retreated the tenant requested a further and more substantial rent reduction due to more of his staff working off premises. This was well below the market rate but the tenant soon withdrew. Unfortunately, the premises remained untenanted for a full year and resulted in the draw down of SSEC reserves largely through employment expenses. The resignation of the employee at the end of December 2022 alleviated further draw downs and the decision to operate without an employee was taken in view of the deteriorating finances.

A ceiling and lighting upgrade was made in January 2023. Several potential tenants then emerged but the only significant one wanted a kitchenette installed. No other units in the building have one but given the need for tenancy this was undertaken. This involved the passing of two motions at the AGM of the Owner Corporation in April and then an Approval Assessment for Fire safety reasons.

A significant drag on finances has been the contribution to the strata for a fire safety upgrade dictated by Council. This is an expensive operation which is on-going and caused concern especially while Merton Street was untenanted. Major contributions to this expense may arise over the next few years.

A lease was drawn up for the new tenant and the premises were at last leased from early June. The Kitchenette was completed in late September and will provide a valued additional asset to the premises and a future attraction for tenants.

EMPLOYMENT ISSUE

In November 2022 concerns were expressed by an SSEC employee in relation to their supervisor, a member of the Board. To address these concerns, alternative reporting arrangements were put in place and a mediation process was proposed. This was refused by the employee, who then accused the Board member of bullying and the Board of condoning this behaviour.

Mindful of its obligations to treat the complaint with due diligence, discretion, and a duty of care, the Board granted the employee leave with full pay and promptly engaged Investigative Services Group (ISG) to conduct an impartial third-party investigation of this matter.

The investigation began in early December and included statements and interviews with the relevant SSEC board members. An interview was arranged with the employee which they cancelled the day before and then, following further contact from ISG, sent an email reply after a few days which provided no specific examples for ISG to investigate. Shortly after this at the end of December, the employee resigned. This was in advance of the final determination of the investigation.

The conclusions drawn by ISG were that the allegations made by the complainant were baseless, broad, and unsubstantiated. Regarding the accusations that the Board's failed to apply appropriate governance, ISG found "there is no evidence to suggest that SSEC Board have acted in any manner that was negligent or biased towards the complainant at any time".

THE BOARD

The Board experienced resignations over the course of the year with the loss of Linda Seymour, Mark da Silva, Catherine Reynolds, and Sally Stockbridge.

With the need to maintain a quorum, three existing members were invited to join and thankfully accepted. The Board thanks Grant Kirk, Ross Jeffree, and Cooper Riach for taking up their new roles.

GRATITUDE AND RECOGNITION

SSEC operates upon the goodwill, grace and giving of its active members without which the organisation would be unable to function. Their contribution needs to be acknowledged and so a vote of thanks to the following.

To the 100 members, thank you to all for your continued support.

I would like to thank Sadaf Basamraz for her valuable work as Public Officer. I also acknowledge the work of Lily Meier as Treasurer and her careful and considered management of finances and her enthusiasm for environmental issues.

A very special thank you to Catherine Reynolds for her enormous contribution to SSEC function. Catherine benefits the SSEC with her energy and strategies throughout her campaigns and involvement with a multitude of SSEC functions. The SSEC website and social media channels have achieved a high standard of excellence due to her continued input and dedication.

Thanks to Phil Smith who expends a great deal of effort with managing and reviewing 'Writing for the Environment Award' and 'Speaking for the Planet' entries. Thanks also to the panel of judges who assist with the assessments.

Thanks to Gay Curtis for leading ShireCAN and the contributions of their members.

Thanks to Sarah-Jo Lobwein who has received many plaudits this year, as well as grants and awards, including for a new project called "Marine Biodiversity of Southern Sydney" and for managing SO Shire.

Thanks also to the Sunny Shire group led by Jay Banyer and Jonathan Prendergast.

Thanks to James Lancaster from Audley Dance Hall for his generosity in allowing SSEC to use this grand facility for the Members meeting, the screening of 'The Giants' film and the members Koalas event.

'The Giants' screening success owes special mention to Catherine Reynolds for the concept, costing

and hire of the dance hall, to Linda Seymour who organised the whole extraordinary event of the day along with performing an excellent role introducing and closing the event, to Cooper Riach for his speech and to Megan Edwards, Grant Kirk, Scott Dovey and Lily Meier who helped to make this such a successful event. Thanks also to Barbara Koppe who took on the task of contacting members and informing them of the film presentation and other SSEC activities.

Thanks also to SSEC members Annabel and Sue McTaggart for the possum dray making workshop at the beautiful Bundeena House.

Thanks also to Diana Smit for initiating the Streamwatch program.

Thanks to those involved with the Koala Campaign.

Thanks also to the Electrify Bundeena team who worked to make this a success. Scott Dovey, Vera Auerbach, Valerie Etienne, Ken Heskett, Beth Buchanan, Greg and Judy Walker, Jim Tsinganos, Rebecca Mills, and others and special thanks to SSEC member Jay Banyer who spoke on the day, and also Daniel Debreceeny.

I would like to thank all members for any contributions they have made and the current members of the board for the skills and contributions they provide.

DONATIONS

I would like to thank all those who have made donations to the SSEC since the last AGM with special thanks for the generous donations received from Barbara Koppe, Nick Boes, Margaret Bradford, Adam McNeilly, Maureen O'Malley and Ben Watson.

Thanks also to those who made donations to fund the Koala Road signs on Heathcote Road, notably Woronora Valley Residents Association, Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society, John Souvleris, Lily Meier, Jason Ardler, Kristen MacDonald, Anthony Trost, Marelle Burnum Burnum, Peter Mahoney, Catherine Reynolds, Maria Paola Torti, Justin Taylor, Breanne McClafferty, Grant Kirk, Barbara West and Heather Robertson.

THE FUTURE

SSEC moves into the future with continued advocacy and support for the local environment and efforts will be made to encourage member activities providing interaction and the sharing of skills. It has an engaging website and a vibrant Facebook page.

SSEC now has the Merton Street Property tenanted and with the completion of the new kitchenette in early October an increased asset. Rents will pay for the installation of the kitchenette and further income will improve finances in general although expenses for the Fire Safety Upgrade may still hamper immediate growth.

Special mention needs to be made of the continuing prodigious effort to two significant campaigns being coal pollution and koala campaigns plus the website, Facebook page and Twitter by Board member Catherine Reynolds. Again, without her efforts the SSEC would be significantly less effective.

SSEC now has a new and potentially eye-catching campaign in Electrify Bundeena thanks to Board member Scott Dovey. This campaign will surely have positive outcomes for Bundeena and act as a beacon for the entire Sutherland Shire as it transitions to a renewable future together with placing SSEC in a respected position regarding environmental action going forward.

SSEC will continue to encourage local area environmental projects financially through LEAF funding.

SSEC encourages more members to become involved. More input from members will lessen the burden on the current management which achieves a lot with just a few dedicated Board members. I look forward to SSEC providing a leading role in environmental matters for the Sutherland Shire for the year to come and with that the invitation to all members to help advance the cause.

Ian Hill
Chair SSEC

SSEC Annual Awards

SSEC Life Membership: Bob Crombie

A lifetime of working in nature and national parks. A lifetime of care and protection for nature around the Sutherland Shire and throughout NSW.

Bob Crombie contributed so much over the years, always willing to share his extraordinary knowledge of natural areas and ecology, always gracious and kind. His encompassing love and respect for natural areas permeates all he does.

The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre advocacy to protect the Royal National Park from the Peabody coal mine would not have begun without Bob's input and knowledge. We would not have made the case without his photographic documentation of the evidence.

He first pointed out impacts from the Peabody mine in Camp Gully Creek on his engaging "First National Park" Facebook page. But this



Bob Crombie

page also features his beautiful stories of The Guardian and the Bee Cave, the Extraordinary Tree, the Remarkable Tree, and Puff the Dragon at Robertson's Knoll. His knowledge of the landscape, and the importance of connectivity across wild areas built our collective knowledge of what is needed to protect koalas and other native animals across our region.

Bob's background has informed the voluntary advocacy he now carries out:

- First Ranger Naturalist for Royal National Park
- First environmental educator at State Pollution Control Commission
- Initiator, teacher for Sutherland Shire Council's Heritage Weeks
- Educator on wilderness protection in TAFEs and community colleges
- Ran first Ecology and Environmental Management of Royal National Park for Bushfire Control Officers and firefighters
- Designed Wallumarra Track to meet the educational needs of schools, TAFE's and Universities

He has since been a regular speaker for community and industry groups: the Australian Plants Society; the Port Hacking Wildflower group; the Southern Districts National Parks Association; Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society; and WIRES. Even for a group of bikies last year on a koala awareness day ride!

Bob helped protect quality of the Sutherland Shire environment:

- 1978: led campaign against proposed routing of F6 freeway through western boundary of RNP. An ABC documentary was prepared on this matter – it featured Bob
- 1986-88: formative member of the Port Hacking Planning and Advisory Committee
- 1982: founded Friends of the Hacking River

- 2000: short-listed for Alan Strom Environmental Activism Award and the Eureka Prize.

Bob has bewildered many parts of Sutherland Shire. His garden in Sutherland featured on Burke's Backyard and Gardening Australia with focus on eco-scaping backyards. In 2005 he transformed Pollard Park, Kirrawee, from a grassed public park with a concrete bus shelter into a small bushland reserve of Critically Endangered Ecological Community Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest. There are many more stories to be told about the guerrilla gardening – but you'll have to ask him.

In 2009 he was the co-founder of First National Park group with Bob Walshe that campaigned for World Heritage Listing of Royal Reserves: Royal and Heathcote National Parks and the Garawarra State Conservation Area. He prepared a report on The World Heritage Values of the Royal Reserves.

In 2018 he contributed to the Verge Garden Guidelines for Sutherland Shire Council.

2018-2023: Campaigned strongly to recognise the importance and necessity for wildlife to be able to move over the landscape. He raised awareness about the importance of repurposing Cawley's Rd bridge as a multipurpose wildlife overpass, which culminated in the proposal Reconstruction of Cawley's Road Bridge, Helensburgh.

Bob continues tirelessly to take direct action, help others do the same...and influence policy at local, state and national levels. We've been blessed to have his advice. This life membership is well overdue.

Phil Smith & Catherine Reynolds

Bill Ryan Award for Activism

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre established the Bill Ryan Activism Award as a tribute to a remarkable man, and to honour his belief in the power and value of non-violent direct action for the benefit of the environment.

The 2022 Bill Ryan Activism Award is traditionally announced the AGM, but included in the subsequent years Annual Report. The winner of the 2022 Award is Dr Sharyn Andersen, (Sharyn Cullis), who shared many of the same qualities as Bill: the capacity to inspire, and determination. Sadly, this Award was given posthumously, Sharyn passed away in June, 2022, a huge loss to many in and around south west Sydney who've missed Sharyn's insight and her brilliant campaign strategising.

I got to know Sharyn originally with our petition to stop the mining under Woronora Reservoir, she'd been in there and seen the damage. Sharyn was also involved in the RiverSOS group which SSEC was also a member of, that took part in a court case to try to stop Peabody mining under Woronora Reservoir in 2009. We collaborated further with the koala and wildlife crossing campaign. Sharyn first alerted me to the koala kill zone at Deadman's Creek, and was a member of the Save Sydney's Koalas group who took out the court case against Lend Lease. The more I



Dr Sharyn Cullis, recipient of this year's Bill Ryan Award

got to know her the more respect and appreciation I felt for her depth of knowledge, and ability to strategise. Sharyn could be charming, funny and quick witted, inspiring, cynical and optimistic all at the same time. She wrote beautifully, and spoke in public in such a compelling way. She was able to

convey the nub of complex issues in a manner that was entirely accessible.

We received many nominations supporting Sharyn for this Award.

Deb Andrew, a member of the NSW Wader Study Group, and formerly NPWS Natural Heritage, noted Sharyn's commitment to the environment extended to her completing a Masters, and later a PhD. Sharyn's Masters was on the government's plan to put in the second airport at the Holsworthy Defence base. (We now know koalas live there.) For her PhD Sharyn chose to research longwall mining in the Southern Coalfields. Deb noted how Sharyn built on her research with direct advocacy, including through the Georges River Environmental Alliance group Sharyn founded. To stop the Dendrobium mine extension she contributed to the Planning Assessment Commission, and later the Independent Planning Commission Review.

Julie Sheppard, another renowned environmental advocate in her own right, spoke of Sharyn campaigning against CSG, how she used to organise pop-up protest picnics against proposed CSG gas well drilling. Julie noted Sharyn's opposition to BHP's expansion which would've undermined the entire O'Hares Creek system and hundreds of upland swamps, the lifeblood of the Georges River system: Sharyn's "magnificent PhD thesis comprehensively documented this. It remains a valuable historical record and a scholarly analysis of a great achievement." Julie also noted Sharyn's role in lobbying for the creation of Dharawal National Park, highlighted her work on committees, and protests she was involved in: "Sharyn was always up for a good protest. She was happy to travel and hold up a placard for causes she believed in - big marches in Sydney, small groups at Warragamba Dam and Darkes Forest, the huge anti-CSG walk over the Seacliff Bridge in Wollongong."

Gary Dunnett, the EO of the National Parks Association referred to how he met Sharyn when she was the Principal of the Chipping Norton Environment Education Centre, and said he was struck by the quality of Sharyn's teaching. He mentioned her deep understanding of the land and the waters that flowed through each catchment, and the value of her intense rigorous questioning, which she brought to her longstanding role as a member of the National Parks Regional Advisory Committee. He noted Sharyn's strong advocacy for

the protection of Georges River, and what was later to become Dharawal National Park.

Kim Wagstaff, the President of Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society related how Sharyn's lifelong interest in the environment was sparked as a child when she found a turtle, which might have been blinded as a result of chemicals in a creek. He mentioned Sharyn's later involvement with the Georges RiverKeeper and their River Health Monitoring program. She received an Award for that too. Sharyn was able to combine her advocacy with intellectual rigor and a whole range of creative protests. Kim described how Sharyn scaled a fence 15 years ago and chained herself to the ground in Oatley Park to prevent a concrete pour for a mobile phone tower destroying bushland. "Sharyn was filmed by TV crews as they were carried off police. It was shown on the news that evening." The outcry it caused and the public sentiment led to the Council engaging lawyers. The case went as far as the High Court, and the phone tower was removed.

Everyone who knew Sharyn saw the tremendous energy she put into all of this over decades. Kim has given us a whole huge long list of other campaigns and other advocacy she was involved in. It is simply too much to relay here.

Another nomination came from Rob Michie, a past Chair of the Georges River Catchment Management Committee. Rob talked of how Sharyn was so important, and not just for her environmental knowledge. He said what was just as important, but less easy to describe, was Sharyn's role "supporting and enthusing others, and helping to find ways to bypass blockages." He also pointed out her "relentless determination to succeed, which also seemed to be infectious."

Two of her projects Rob mentioned were "The Feral Trolley Round-up", and an event called "A day in the Life of the Georges River" which involved 10,000 students in environmental activities across the catchment in one day.

I'm very glad and proud that on behalf of Sutherland Shire Environment Centre we are able to go some way towards recognising what Sharyn gave to others, and to the environment. Sharyn's husband Philip Andersen has received the Award for her, and nominated the Nature Conservation Council to be the recipient of the \$1,000 prize.

Catherine Reynolds

SSEC Sustainable Business Awards 2022

The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre was honoured to support and encourage sustainable local businesses by sponsoring the 'Sustainability Award' category in the Sutherland Shire Local Business Awards for the fourth year in 2022. Sarah-Jo and Linda attended the event on 29th September, and Sarah-Jo presented the category winner and highly commended businesses. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to highlight leaders in the community that are modelling and committing to sustainability in local business across all industries – from services and products. They are using the planet's resources responsibly and minimising waste and financial costs in the long term.

All sustainable practices are considered, including but not limited to reducing waste, emissions, and single use plastic pollution - a single sustainable choice has a huge positive and motivating influence on our local community. This is a great opportunity for local businesses to evaluate their operations and be recognised for their shining example. These businesses deserve our support, and we encourage others to follow their lead and introduce more sustainable practices.

Winner – Table to Earth

This compost service is very much needed in the Sutherland Shire. By collecting food scraps that

otherwise would have gone to landfill, this reduces methane emissions, and the food scraps are turned into energy to heat up homes and the organic waste is then turned into nutrient rich soil. Table to Earth is a closed loop business, and they offer compostable (including bioplastics) packaging that can be collected in their compost collection service, which enables their customers to reduce waste in venues and even in the home. Table to Earth is unique as it is a shire-based, Australian family-owned business (the only business in the Sutherland Shire) to offer a closed loop service where they provide compostable packaging and a compost collection service as a whole service. Hopefully this business can inspire the Sutherland Council to introduce FOGO bins to the Sutherland Shire.

Highly Commended – The Sewing Basket

This business is an enterprise that is committed to reducing craft and textile waste, educating the public and providing inclusive employment for disabled people. Their setup is amazing - everything in their shop is donated by the public, and everything that comes into their shop is either sold as second-hand items, reused, recycled, or repurposed.

Sarah-Jo Lobwein



Table to Earth



The Sewing Bascet

Competitions

RD Walshe National Writing for the Environment Competition

The 2023 competition was entitled, Future, what Future? It asked writers to put themselves in their fictional future whilst considering the environment and broader sustainability concepts. From the media release:

This year's national competition attracted almost 100 entries. They came from almost all States and Territories. For the first time in this annual competition, judging was conducted separately for each of the age categories. For the Under 19 submissions, Laura Kirk, a teacher at Queenwood School for Girls established a team of judges. For the 19-26 and Over 60 category submissions, Phil Smith and Alex Talbot worked with small teams of their own. Thanks to Scott and Catherine for getting the website and submission portal done.

[Here are the winners. A full report with links to winners and runners-up is on the website.](#)

Under 19

The judges' summative comments included:

- all the pieces were skilfully crafted, inventive, and thought-provoking
- all stories raised awareness about the mistreatment of the earth and, thankfully, also offered hope for a more sustainable future.

"I believe the conversations that took place amongst the judges worked to improve the writing skills of the judges themselves."

Laura Kirk, Teacher, Queenwood School for Girls

FIRST PLACE

This is the way the world ends, by Charlee Rose Murtough-Coombes (NSW)

Despite varying favourites across the finalists, there was a clear consensus for the winning entry, *This is the way the world ends*, due to its thoughtful representation of the consequences of industrialisation that provoked awareness and raised the necessary questions for the upcoming generation.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DzKaft-dugKoOZTEE_7uGpFm7qp_bFU9/view

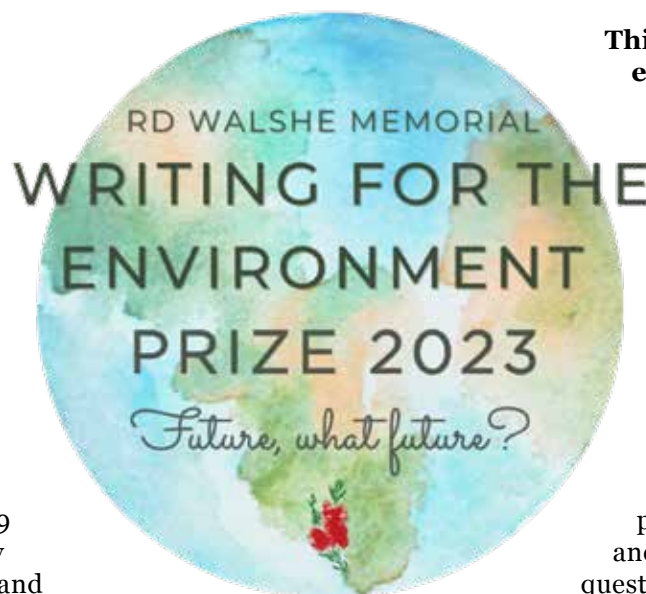
An important and wonderful note here: Charlee Rose won the inaugural Pat Strong Award in 2020, an encouragement award from Sutherland Writers Group.

The Pat Strong Award for a Young Writer

This award honours one of the Sutherland Writers Group's foundation members.

Future, What Future?, by Alex Mason (Vic)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NGWmRBBkXbyeBt7gm5fq6hExqen-r1oc/view>



19-26

Judges said the pieces were well-written and creative; they were inventive and thought-provoking; all stories offered the reader mental and emotional challenges.

“For many writers, this competition seemed to give breath to their courage. Writers found and created futures by extrapolating from current trends and scientific and sociological evidence, as well as taking the internal stuff, the human stuff, the personal stuff to an extreme. All touched some raw truths about our world as it is.”

Phil Smith

FIRST PLACE

Generation Beta, by Ingrid Coram (Vic)

This piece explored a future tarnished by choices made in the past – that is, today. It considered the sensitive description of the conflict around whether or not to bring children into a shattered, dysfunctional world. The ending was powerful: “My 35 year old self kisses her sleeping girl’s forehead, whispering a soft apology for what she has done.”

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EYSIYnQzHn7vR8lwXYtbJ5-i7SNuFuOY/view>

Over 60

“So many of the pieces were beautifully written and of publishable quality. I was moved by many of the stories, tickled by occasional wry humour and struck by how many writers managed to successfully blend a practical view of our future in a climate crisis with a drop of optimism. All three pieces showed tremendous creative thinking, quick wit and a thoughtful view of our future.”

Alex Talbot

FIRST PLACE

Future Scents, by J S Sholtz (NSW)

Future Scents by J. S. Scholz took out the top prize, a story that was wickedly funny and touching in equal measure, the humour and quality of writing gave it the edge for the judges.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CP8lgkvNl9Gd6FCZhnH_1Gvow4m7n3_e/view



Bob was an educator, historian, journalist, and environmentalist. He authored many books on history, English, and writing, and he wrote articles on the environment for many years for the newspaper *Shire Life*, and for a number of other environmental magazines. Bob produced Australia’s first global warming poster for the Commonwealth Government in the late 1980s. The origins of the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre are proudly traced back to writing courses Bob ran in the Sutherland Shire.

Laura, Alex and I thank all the judges: John, Syd, Barbara, Sarwat, Pete, Kieran, Nhu Ngoc, Alex, Grant, Lily, Mia, Nicola, Chelsea and the Yr10 Writing Group at Queenwood School for Girls.

Thanks to the Sutherland Writers Group and to Barbara and Wally Koppe for their contributions to prizes for this competition.

Here’s the full report: <https://www.ssec.org.au/grants-and-awards/rd-walshe-memorial-writing-for-the-environment-prize/writing-for-the-environment-award-2023/>

Phil Smith & Alex Talbot

Speaking 4 the Planet

These past 12 months have seen the conduct of two national competitions.

One in Australia in partnership with the Australian Association for Environmental Education and Paddy Pallin. Indeed, S4P is developing MOUs with both these organisations. The topic for the Australian competition was in two parts: an overarching theme, Edge of the Future, and a local priority drawn from the SDGs and selected by participating councils. More than 20 councils participated from NSW, Qld, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Victoria. The most popular subheadings and SDGs were:

- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption
- SDG 13: Climate Action.

The other national competition is happening right now in Vietnam. We are working with Save Vietnam's Wildlife to run a competition entitled, Go Wild! Protect Vietnam's Wildlife. We sought sponsorship but were unsuccessful. My team and I are running it at our own expense.

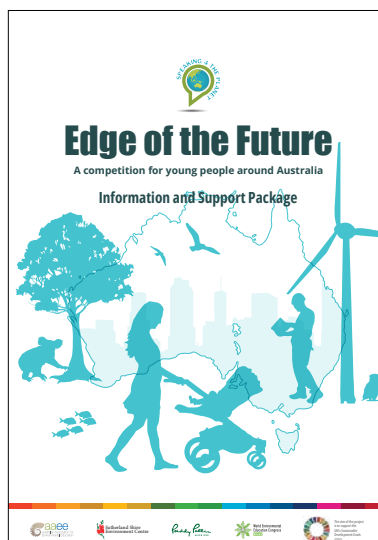
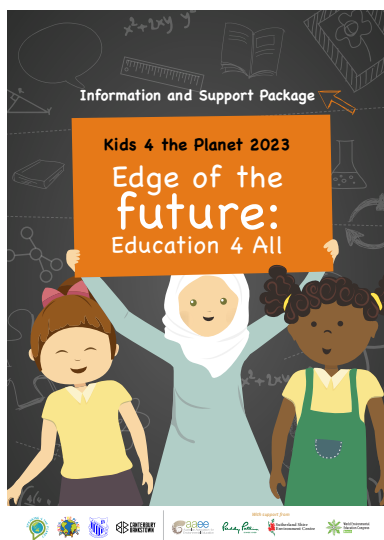
Mr Thai Nguyen, CEO of SVW and winner of the 2021 Goldman Environmental Award for environmental activism is the competition patron. Ms Hanh Do from SVW prepared this video to help with the sponsorship process. [GO WILD: Protect Vietnam's Wildlife - S4P and SVW Vietnam 2023 - English version - YouTube](#)



I coached Minh Khue, an 8 year old student at Ba Dinh Primary School to prepare this speech to promote the competition: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXsgpqI41UI>

Other competitions:

- Canada Bay, Strathfield, Burwood. Topic was One Planet: Our Future – Consume with Care. I coached Ms Nguyen Thi PhuongTrang, a uni student in Hai Phong, Vietnam, to prepare an introductory video: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_oB0smsXBYn97KaQZa-TJpkRWBQznJCS/view
- It took place at Homebush Boys HS on 5 June 2023. Congratulations and thanks to Robin Smith from Climate Action Burwood Canada Bay who managed the development and delivery of this event!





- Christchurch, NZ, on 11 July. Competition categories were prepared speech, spoken word poetry, visual art, short video, and impromptu drama - with competitors coming from a number of different schools and learning institutions from across the city and district. It was a brilliant success. A full report is available on request. Congratulations to Jocelyn Papprell from Environment Canterbury for her 6th year of S4P events in Christchurch!
- Lakemba PS hosted its 6th Kids 4 the Planet event. The topic they chose was Edge of the Future: Education for All. I coached, Minh Khue, a 7yr old at Ba Dinh Primary School in Ha Noi, to make this introductory speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icJSGQyZPOo>

This year also saw the World EE Congress Secretariat endorse S4P. They published an article in their global newsletter: <https://weecnetwork.org/speaking-4-the-planet/>

Thanks as always to SSEC for its ongoing support. And thanks to the councils that participated this year.

Thanks again to Petur Farkas in Hungary for his incredible design and layout skills! Thanks to Hanh for the research and website and design work she did. Incredible news that she won the job as PA for the CEO!

Thanks to Rasha Zreika and Jann Price (Principal) at Lakemba PS for inspiring their schools and others in the neighbourhood to participate in incredible events!

Thanks to Emma Jessop at Paddy Pallin – a company that has supported S4P from the very beginning!

Phil Smith

Campaigns

Spring Gully Protection

This year the Spring Gully Protection Group celebrated its tenth anniversary. The group was formed by Bundeena residents in March 2013 when the Scouts placed their 5.6Ha property of pristine, high conservation value bushland at Spring Gully on the market for sale. The land is nested into the Royal National Park at the south-east corner of Bundeena.

In the last ten years we have successfully seen Sutherland Shire Council:

- Rezone the land to Environmental Conservation,
- Advise the NSW Government to acquire the land for addition to the Royal National Park,
- Transfer their adjoining 8Ha of bushland and coastal upland swamp into the Royal National Park,
- Agree that six kilometres of unmade road reserves in Spring Gully be transferred into the Royal



Spring Gully is one of the most biodiverse areas within the Royal National Park.

National Park. (These unmade roads are a legacy of the 1886 subdivision of the original crown land grant that formed Bundeena).

In 2017 the Land and Environment Court approved a proposal to build six safari tents and a caretaker residence on the land and the clearing of over 430 mature trees for an asset protection zone. Sutherland Shire Council describes the land as an extreme bushfire risk. The local RFS brigade opposed development. Also to be cleared is a large area of Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub, a state and federally listed critically endangered ecological community.

This year the incoming NSW Government have committed to:

- a) A review of the approval for road access to the proposed development through the Royal National Park.
- b) Conduct an ecological assessment of the conservation values of the land. The Member for Heathcote, Maryanne Stuart stated that she would support addition to the Royal National Park if merited by the report.

Local residents are calling for an independent investigation into why the six kilometres of unmade road have not been transferred into the Royal National Park in accordance with the formal determinations made by both Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We also seek an independent review of questionable land dealings involving the road reserves.

After ten years, local residents remain committed to conserving the beautiful, ecologically rich bushland at Spring Gully and protecting the Royal National Park from inappropriate private development. Spring Gully remains the missing jewel in the crown of the Royal National Park.

Mark Da Silva, Convenor, Spring Gully Protection Group



Spring Gully contains a rich mosaic of endangered ecological communities listed under the Threatened Species Conservation Act

Koala advocacy by SSEC members

Koala advocacy was given less attention with the furore over the Peabody Royal National Park pollution through 2022, and early 2023, however we did make some advances.

Quite a bit occurred last October: we achieved support at the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) for a motion opposing koala translocation in south-west Sydney. This was possible thanks to the work of SSEC member Billy Bray who wrote a brilliant background summation of the academic studies on the issue. Also in October SSEC member Georgia Wallace Crabbe was on a panel at the Koala Conference in Coffs Harbour. Her Koalas documentary now covers the dire situation up and down the East Coast of Australia, offering an extraordinary insight into government policies failing to prevent koala extinction. Several SSEC members also attended the Engadine Woronora Heights koala rally, which was organised by SSEC members John Souvleris and Ross McLennan. This was not an SSEC event but I contacted the Total

Environment Centre (TEC) to get the fabulous Coolah the koala suit for the rally, and the TEC's Saul Deane agreed to be one of the speakers.

Late last year SSEC signed a MOU to collaborate with the Sydney Basin Koala Network (SBKN), funded by the TEC and WIRES. Lily Meier attended the SBKN koala training day in November.

In February the SBKN released two commissioned reports: one showing a huge increase in koala road strikes, including a significant increase across the Sutherland Shire. The second report was by the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) on the inadequacy of regulatory measures to protect koalas across the Sydney Basin bioregion. SSEC was cited in that report, and it had a case study on the non-existent Sutherland Shire Koala SEPP.

In April, Ian Hill, Lily Meier, and I attended a SW Sydney Koala Project meeting at Campbelltown,



but one issue through this time was our capacity. We knew Sutherland Shire Council was working on a koala management plan. This seemed to be on track, despite the lengthy delay. There were positive reports of DPIE drone surveys, and NPWS was sending up drones to check for koalas before hazard reduction burns. With the Deadman's Creek koala kill zone we also trusted Transport NSW to do the right thing once the options report on how to address road kill with mitigation measures was released. That turned out to be a mistake. One flag was that Transport NSW provided no information about koala road kill mitigation works for the Heathcote Road Bridge widening project over Woronora River.

In June 2023 I started counting up previous reports of kills and rescues, prompted by a social media post by Christy Walker about a koala killed around the Heathcote Rd bridge over the Woronora river. I then realised with horror just how many koalas were dying on Heathcote Rd. Two weeks later another koala was killed at the same location. Christy suggested I contact the guys who worked on the Woronora Heights campaign – which was a brilliant idea. I briefed John and Ross, and through this time it became clear that no koala mitigation works had been carried out at Woronora Bridge, and work there had in fact created a path up to the road for koalas. It was invaluable liaising with the Stephanie from the SBKN: she was able to draw on expert advice from the specialist koala ecology group Biolink about questionable mitigation measures at Deadmans which Transport had carried out.

With John and Ross stepping in a whole flurry of activity occurred over the next few months. We found that the NSW Koala Strategy team and Transport had not registered the increased kill rates on Heathcote Rd. Christy Walker contacted the State MP for Heathcote who promised to look into the matter further. Christy and Michelle Wallis from WIRES both did an important ABC radio interview; an article followed, then a television report for the evening news in late July. After I wrote to Sutherland Shire Councillors they passed a unanimous motion calling for Transport to provide better protection for koalas, and Council applied to Transport to put signs up on Heathcote Rd. (This seems to have been blocked by Transport.) Other koalas continued to die around Deadmans Creek, including a mother with a 4mth old joey.

Through this time John, Ross and I were having ongoing discussions with Transport about mitigation works, and arranged a site meeting with them and Defence in early August. We found another dead koala on the road while we were there. Mid August, John and I briefed the Sandy Points Residents Association on the issue. A week later we held an SSEC members briefing at Audley Dance Hall. Jade Peace from SBKN did a presentation on Koala SEPPs. The following week I attended a Sutherland Koala Steering group meeting, hosted by Sutherland Council, and representatives from a range of other agencies. No definitive information was provided about why the Sutherland SEPP was delayed. Transport did not attend, and as John and I processed the timeframe for mitigation works at Deadmans we became increasingly troubled. Was it really necessary for Transport to choose the option which forced them to put the fence through an endangered ecological community, requiring them to liaise with Defence and get an EIS from Liverpool Council? Transport have still not given us any answer as to why they chose one option rather than any other, and why they were ignoring other recommendations from the report they commissioned.

Sometime through this period Linda Seymour and I saw a rough cut of Georgia's film, which graphically portrayed government inertia and failure to protect koalas. Linda had organised the screening of the wonderful Bob Brown Giants film in July, and many of us were inspired by that. Georgia also arranged a public preview of her koala documentary at Bundeena in July, and then a private screening for the new Parliamentary Friends of the Koala group. I was proud SSEC had put on the screening of the Bob Brown film, had supported Georgia's film, and that Georgia's work had the power to comprehensively illustrate to policy makers how government needed to change course and act effectively to address the prospect of koala extinction.

The Rally for Native Forests was in August, and a number of SSEC members went along. Native forests are vital habitat for koalas.

Another issue that had come up through this time was the lag between when local koala kills and sightings were reported, and when this data was being uploaded to Bionet, which the government uses to guide policy actions. Only some of the road kills at Deadmans were recorded. SBKN



looked into the matter further, only to find that WIRES data was not being uploaded and in some cases Bionet records were four years out of date. News and TV reports about this came out in early September.

In September John Souvleris, Grant Kirk, and Ross Jeffree met with Heathcote MP Maryanne Stuart and let her know about problems with the mitigation works Transport was carrying out, as well as delays. She confirmed she'd arranged for two temporary electronic and six permanent fixed signs on Heathcote Rd. This was welcome news, though six fixed signs along the 24 kms stretch of road were unlikely to achieve much. Unfortunately, when the electronic signs went up they were poorly sited, obscured, and out of

drivers' direct line of sight. We'd been planning to fund temporary road signs though the breeding season, and support this with crowd funding. This was John's brilliant idea.

We launched on 20 September: members of Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society were there, Save Sydney Koalas, Michelle from WIRES, the wonderful Bob Crombie, and Jade and Stephanie from SBKN, who brought the famous Coolah the koala suit. Grant took the photos, John prepared the media release for The Leader, and when that was published it added to the list of new articles, and built public awareness about issues impacting koalas in our area.

Catherine Reynolds

Electrify Bundeena

The Electrify Bundeena campaign held its public launch on 10 September 2023 in the Bundeena Community Centre, with about 80 people in attendance.

This campaign was inspired by the work of the Australian renewable energy and electrification guru, Saul Griffith. Saul's book *The Big Switch* lays out a pathway to achieving huge cuts in our carbon emissions through the total electrification of our homes and workplaces, powered by cheap, clean, renewables.

A team of local volunteers in Bundeena are leading the way, with an ambitious program of community education, lobbying and commercial partnerships to achieve 100% net renewables in Bundeena's energy usage in the next 5 years.

Electrify Bundeena is one of a growing number of grass roots community electrification projects to emerge over the last few years. With leadership



provided by Saul Griffith's Rewiring Australia organisation, these groups are now exploring ways to share ideas and resources and help others get started on the electrification journey.

The SSEC hopes the Electrify Bundeena campaign will help kickstart others in the Sutherland Shire (and beyond!) and provide a model for ordinary citizens to take meaningful climate action at both an individual and community level.

Scott Dovey, Convenor



Shire Climate Action Network 2022/2023 Year in Review

Shire Climate Action Network (ShireCAN) has had another action-packed year.

State: We developed and distributed scorecards highlighting the climate policies of the major political parties and distributed 'Climate Action Now' signage and stickers to Shire residents to ensure that climate action was a top priority in the State election. ShireCAN added our endorsement to Sydney Alliance's Community Energy Hub letter to NSW Major Parties. We continue to network with other NSW climate groups by attendance at the NCC's monthly Climate and Energy Working Group meetings.

Federal: Early in the year, we met with new Local Federal MP for Hughes to raise awareness about ShireCAN and to address key issues within their electorate. ShireCAN endorsed Climate Australia Network Association's joint letter to the Federal Government to support strong, mandatory Fuel

Efficiency Standards and 350 Australia's Fossil Free Sponsorship Letter for the Arts, Sports and Education.

Shire-based: ShireCAN members have developed a good rapport with the Environmental Science Unit of the Sutherland Shire Council (SSC) by attending quarterly meetings to receive updates, discuss and input into key sustainability initiatives and collaborate and work together. A community Renewable Energy Survey was developed by our group and the results shared with Sutherland Council to help develop their climate strategy.

We joined forces with SSC and BicycleNSW to advocate for effective routing for the Sutherland to Cronulla Active Transport Link (SCATL), attending Transport NSW stakeholder briefing forum, meeting with Mark Speakman and Eleni Petinos, writing letters to relevant State ministers and holding a 'save the trees' event.





7 out of 10 people in the Shire believe greater action on climate will strengthen the Australian economy. Join us in showing our politicians what needs to happen.

We worked closely with the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre with the Peabody Campaign regarding the review of Metropolitan Collieries Pty Ltd Environment Protection Licence, lodging two submissions to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) regarding the Metropolitan Collieries Pty Ltd Environment Protection Licence.

ShireCAN assisted Jannali Preschool with their successful Tradies' iPromise Sustainability Grant to fund the installation of rooftop solar.

We continue to grow as a group as residents in the Shire and reach out to find like-minded people who care about our planet and want to take an active role to mitigate the damage of climate change. Some of our activities aimed at engaging with residents include holding market stalls at Engadine and Sutherland, hosting quarterly café meet-ups, sending out a monthly newsletter to 320+ subscribers.

In the upcoming months, our group plans to launch an 'electrify' campaign to promote, to Shire residents and businesses, the economic and environmental benefits of phasing out gas in favour of electricity utilising solar panels, electric vehicles, heat pumps, induction cooktops.

For more details on ShireCAN's recent work please refer to our full-length report and these stories published in The Leader:

- [Shire survey on home solar power experiences while community organisations are invited to seek grants](#)
- [Cardboard cutout hearts attached to 73 trees to be cut down for Sutherland to Cronulla cycle-walk path section](#)
- [Jannali Preschool awarded biggest grant in Tradies club's sustainability grants program](#)
- [Shire Climate Action Network \(ShireCAN\) supports national competition for high school students](#)

ShireCAN Coordinator, Gay Curtis wholeheartedly thanks the ShireCAN team 'who has worked tirelessly to make a difference to the climate cause.' The work we continue to do as a group illustrates the truth of the following statement 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful community citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has.' Margaret Mead, Anthropologist, Activist, Feminist (1901-1978)

Gay Curtis, Coordinator, ShireCAN

SO Shire

“Only 8.4 kgs ...but is thousands of plastic pieces”
Cronulla Rotary volunteer.

Citizen Science Clean Ups

We continue our monthly clean ups with Rotary Cronulla, and other groups/events including Youth Week with Cronulla Surfing Academy, Tradies Gynea, and Jenson Hates Waste for Plastic Free July, and World Environment Day, World Ocean Day, World Clean Up Day, Earth Day and Clean up Australia Day. We assisted Jenson Hates Waste with his recent campaign “Tidy Taren Point” to get a public waste service (bins) along the Taren Point / Woolooware shared boardwalk. In just one clean up event, we collected 162.4 kilos of rubbish including food packaging, coffee cups, and polystyrene. Jenson (aged 7) presented to the Sutherland Shire Council, so we will keep you updated on the progress of the installation of these bins.

Since the July 2022, we have been finding legacy litter (40+ years old) single use litter on beaches and in the eroding sand between North Cronulla and Green Hills. Items we have been finding include PET bottles and their HDPE black bottom sliders from the 1980s, Aluminium cans from 1970s and 1980s (Shelley’s, Pepsi, Fanta etc) with their different soda can tabs, including a Pepsi can from 1979, Blue plastic straws from the 1980s (found inside the 1980s cans that were found buried in the sand strata/cliffs), 1980s McDonald’s expanded polystyrene (Styrofoam) clam shells from the various type of burgers; Chip packets from 1980s and Tetrapaks from 1984!

We complete weekly balloon debris and cotton bud debris counts at one site in Kurnell, collecting data on the change of the number of plastic cotton buds washed in from local sewage since they were banned in NSW from November 1st, 2022, and we are collecting data on the number of pieces of



We assisted Jenson Hates Waste with his recent campaign.

balloon items (strings, rings, whole and remnants) washing in since 1st January 2023 as evidence for need of balloon releases to be banned by NSW and Federal governments.

Awards

We were recently honoured with the Rotary community Certificate of Appreciation at the change over dinner of Rotary Club Cronulla (Rotaract district 9675).

Film Screenings

#netsoutnow campaign - In September last year we hosted a screening of the documentary Envoy: Shark Cull at Hazelhurst to educate the public on the scientific evidence AGAINST the SHARK NET meshing program in NSW waters.

The Giants screening and Speak for the Trees Campaign - SO SHIRE were honoured to host Andy Marks and his repurposed “Speak for the Trees” artwork created with Brooke Thompson – made from multiwall paper flour sacks.

Marine Conservation

Throughout the year we track certain species for citizen science projects including the “blue fleet” (*Glaucus nudibranchs*) and local sightings of box jellyfish. In April 2023 we assisted the collection of two samples of a yet to be identified box jellyfish, which are now with the Australian Museum for genetic identification to determine the species. During National Science Week (August 2023) attended the SIMS and Gamay Rangers hosted event showcasing the marine science projects utilising Indigenous knowledge in the Gamay/Kamay Bay

Other Projects

In August last year Sarah-Jo attended The Point Preschool (one of our SO SHIRE sustainable schools) award ceremony for winning the Little Scientists NSW Early STEM Award for their “the spectacular find”. For this year’s SeaWeek (March 2023) the school’s director Catherine and Sarah-Jo presented to Australian Association for Environmental Education members all about this inquiry based, ocean literacy project.



We were honoured with the Rotary Community Certificate of Appreciation

In September, as one of Boomerang Alliance allies, we assisted their single use coffee cup survey campaign, including public advocacy in Cronulla Mall.

In November, Sarah-Jo presented a small summary of SO Shire’s and Plastic Free Sutherland Shire’s citizen science plastic pollution plastic detective findings of modern sewage pollution (and what that means for the true state of our local water quality) at the annual Ocean Watch Australia Marine Muster.

In February, Sarah-Jo presented at the Clean Ocean Foundation forum on Recycled Water (alongside Prof Ian Wright) and thanks to funding from COF attended the CSIRO “Ending Plastic Waste” Symposium in May. In The next year we hope to continue to work on their citizen science projects investigating local sewage pollution, upgrading WWTP and recycled water.

Along with providing local recycling and waste management advice, we also engage in community recycling collections for some hard to recycle items – those cannot be put in the council recycling stream or dropped to a public accessible recycling location.

Participated in three community Working groups (one on Remediation is still ongoing) over the past year, coordinated by WSP for Ampol in “response” to the Ampol Kurnell fuel spill April 7th 2022

Submissions

NO MORE Butts Submission to the consultation paper on the exposure draft of the Bill and Regulations for Public Health (tobacco and other products); Inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia’s oceans and waterways (DCCEEW); PEP; NOPSEMA Otway Basin Marine Seismic Survey; the expansion of Return and Earn in NSW; Sutherland Shire’s 20-year Waste strategy and working group, and various other petitions to state and federal on marine protection, sustainability, waste management and plastic pollution – from shark nets and renewable energies to coffee cups and balloons)

Exciting project for the next 12 months:

SO SHIRE was a recipient of some funding thanks to Blue World Bondi as part of their 2023 Valerie Taylor Ocean Prize. More funding has also been offered thanks to National Parks Association Southern Sydney Branch, and we are very excited to share with you how you can get involved with this citizen science ocean literacy local project called “Marine Biodiversity of Southern Sydney”. This project uses eDNA surveys along with photographic evidence and will help us understand the range of common, rare, migratory, and endangered marine species at certain sites. Inspired by research at other Sydney sites by Dr Joey Di Battista, availability of this public data can engage and advance the public’s understanding of the importance of protecting certain areas and species. We also encourage others to use this data for their research and conservation purposes.

Sarah-Jo Lobwein



#netsoutnow campaign

Peabody's Woronora Reservoir longwall mining and Royal National Park coal pollution

Last year's presentation by Dr Ian Wright at our AGM was followed by a booked out public forum on 30 October at Hazelhurst Gallery, with Ian again, and Greens MLC and former CEO of the Environmental Defenders Office, Sue Higginson. NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) representatives attended.

Now we're at the tail end of 2023, and the EPA has brought 5 charges against Peabody's Metropolitan Colliery under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act, each with a maximum \$1 million penalty. If the full \$5 million penalty is applied it is likely to be small change to a company that size, worth billions. Other lesser penalties have also been levied, manifestly inadequate. But to get this far is nonetheless astonishing – a huge thanks to all SSEC members and supporters who've stepped in to productively and positively bring about this amazing result.

Bob Crombie's knowledge of the Royal National Park and documentation of the pollution in the creek and Hacking (Deeban) River is what made it possible to prosecute this campaign. Other SSEC members who've made vital contributions include Ian Hill, Glen Stephen Betts, Dr Chad Beranek, Shannon Kaiser, and Cooper Riach. The comprehensive frog study led by Shannon and Chad was done at exactly the right time, and countered alternate accounts that attempted to minimise the extent of the ecological damage. Thank you to Glen, Cooper, and all the team who carried out such dedicated research. This was used along with Ian Wright's water testing results in our submission guide to the EPA review of Peabody's 'license to pollute', as well as in the actual SSEC submission. Cooper also organised an EPA submission writing event in January, and there was determination and bonhomie, thanks to Bundeena resident Anne Green's generous hospitality.

On New Years Day Lily Meier, found coal washed up at Grays Point in Port Hacking. The coal had sharp edges, which is considered evidence that it'd been mined recently. The EPA subsequently accepted this came from the Colliery, but then claimed this was "historic coal" from previous spills



© BOB CROMBIE

Coal waste sediment at the Audley Weir precinct.

in decades past, not from the catastrophic pollution event in September.

This claim of "historic coal" was also used to dismiss Russell Arnold, who prior to joining SSEC, had made several videos showing coal in the Hacking River. In June 2022 he wrote to the EPA explaining he was a long term resident of Helensburgh, knew the river very well, and that the amount of coal waste material there was increasing. This report came after Greens MLC Cate Faerhmann raised concerns several times in parliament in 2021.

Knowing what happened to Russell, and seeing EPA statements trying to minimise the extent of the coal waste pollution in the Hacking, contrary to all evidence, made it all the more vexing when they tried to state the coal Lily found in Port Hacking was not from the current spill.

I contacted coal testing companies. They confirmed there was no way of testing how long coal had been at the surface. It seems the EPA had no proof to back up claims they were making about historic coal. One company actually told me that a government department had got in touch with them a week earlier asking whether these same tests were

possible, and that they'd mentioned coal washed up on a beach.

The story about the coal waste in the Hacking was misrepresented by a headline in *The Leader*, and confusing statements provided by the EPA did not help. The question of whether it was safe to reintroduce platypus was another point that drew media attention. This was also a feature of the beautiful brochure we prepared in the lead up to the state election.

Many people had no idea of how the Woronora Reservoir mining and the Royal National Park coal waste pollution were connected. People didn't realise how far the coal waste travelled downstream. The State election was a key time to alert people to these issues and ask for their help encouraging politicians to withdraw support for the mine. Having a brochure laying out the issues comprehensively was wonderful. Huge thanks to Linda Seymour for the map showing the extent of the area impacted across two catchments. Thank you also to the SSEC Board for funding for printing costs.

Huge shout out, and thanks to the following people, not all SSEC members, but people who cared enough to help with letterboxing. Peter Mills distributed a huge number of brochures around Wombarra and surrounding suburbs. A whole range of other areas were covered by Helen Mabbutt, Judy Walker, John Souvleris, Gay Curtis, Pam Campbell, Jenni Fitzgerald, Russell Arnold, Patrick Pestana, Sean Bateman, Mark Fetterplace, Kathy Ryan, Ian Hill, Glen Betts, Andrew Brooks, Diane Townley, Rosie Giddings, Beth Buchanan, and Anne Green.

In February, record flooding saw coal waste washed up all over the lawns around the historic Audley Weir precinct, and I sent in a second submission to the EPA review. This was again thanks to Bob Crombie for the alert. In that second submission I also raised the danger of landslides around the area. This was another point that the EPA chose to ignore – something I noted when I wrote again to the EPA CEO Tony Chappel following the disastrous landslide from the pit top site into Camp Gully Creek in August this year.



Coal sludge waste at Camp Gully Creek, a thick, viscous oily material.



The NSW Greens held their National Parks Policy launch at Audley on 1 March. Coal waste was still visible across the lawns, over 10 kms downstream from the mine. A key policy was “ending inappropriate development and infrastructure in or adjacent to national parks”.

When Cooper Riach decided to run as the Heathcote Greens candidate he raised the issue of the mine pollution as part of his campaign. The damage was graphically illustrated in a video produced by James O’Connor. The two major parties tried to deflect this. Then, when asked a question by a member of the public at a Thirroul candidates forum in early March, Labor’s Maryanne Stuart stated there “will be no expansion, extension or new coal mines in our water catchment”. She also said her party’s policy would be to transition the 400 workers at the Metropolitan mine into the renewable sector: “If elected on March 25, we

would implement that straight away - we need to transition quickly.”

The ABC Illawarra published a report of the meeting with the above quotes. A subsequent report from the Illawarra Mercury pointed out this was not Labor party policy. SSEC re-posted the Illawarra Mercury’s report on SSEC socials, and was attacked by Labor supporters. Providing information to the public about the policy of different political parties on the mining under Woronora was positioned as “campaigning against Labor”. Since the election the new Heathcote MP commented on the SSEC facebook page that she never said she would shut the mine, and it was spreading false rumours to state otherwise.

A week prior to the election the Nature Conservation Council released the results of former WaterNSW mining manager Peter

Dupen's three year research study which detailed a new, severe type of cracking under Reservoir, horizontal subsidence cracking in the substrate of the catchment, in some areas up to 500m long. The type of damage described went far beyond the permissible performance measures, but it was difficult for a layperson to process: without images to explain the nature of the damage the story disappeared under the weight of competing news values. It was later sent to Planning, which has failed to respond.

On 9 May the EPA's review of Peabody's license to pollute was released. The Colliery was allowed to keep operating, and was also still allowed to discharge into Camp Gully Creek, albeit with tightened conditions. A series of deadlines was set for the new conditions and water quality monitoring technology to be implemented through the following months.

On 13 May platypus were translocated into the Hacking, with the experiment timed as a good news Mother's Day story. The Environment Minister Penny Sharpe spoke to 9News about "the great work done by the National Park Service to clean up the river". There was no reference to the fact that EPA charges and a possible court case against Peabody may have been pending. Graham Avery took a series of photos the next week showing disfiguring coal sediment spread over the riverbank and riverbed right near the platypus release site. This was not shown on any of the news reports.

Two months later, in early August, Peabody's timeframe to meet the EPA's license conditions was thrown out, when the landslide from the mine surface pit top facility into Camp Gully Creek caused coal waste to again flood into the Hacking. Penny Sharpe made no comment.

Five weeks later SSEC held our second Streamwatch meeting at the confluence of Camp Gully Creek and the Hacking. There was a greasy dark coating of sludge covering the bottom of the Hacking River downstream from Camp Gully Creek. It stuck to the bottom of the riverbed, like oil or grease sticking to a kitchen sink. Workers had been seen a couple of weeks prior picking lumps of coal out of the river, but that wasn't possible with the sludge. Even sand in the river, which looked normal at first glance, turned the water black when disturbed.

One concern with the "tightened" EPL was emergency risk management procedures. The landslide provided graphic proof the EPA was failing to protect the Royal National Park. No measures had been put in place to prevent the coal waste and sediment flowing downstream. An EPA officer I spoke to suggested the landslide was a 'natural' event, and that the EPA may not even fine the company. That required another letter to Tony Chappel, the EPA CEO.

Diana Smits had suggested in April we start a water testing program, and SSEC joined Greater Sydney Landcare for this purpose. It is thanks to Diana's initiative and the enthusiasm of others involved that we have been able to get this underway. Huge thanks also to Streamwatch coordinator Jessica Lee Lumbroso for her training and support.

This streamwatch program also prompted more discussion about core sediment sampling, which I'd been asking the EPA and NPWS to carry out to no avail. Thanks to Professor Ross Jeffree we now have a solution, and touch wood will know more about this in the new year.

In September another strike against Peabody came when the platypus research team advised that initial e-DNA testing in the Woronora Reservoir catchment found no evidence of platypus, even though they'd been previously sighted there in 2007. The official 2019-22 Sydney Drinking Water Catchment Audit was also released that month. It rang alarms, stating that the quality of the Greater Sydney catchment ecosystems is in decline, "especially in wetlands already under stress from impacts such as longwall mining or urban development."

The report mentioned Sutherland Shire Environment Centre, along with the question we asked: if Peabody are getting away with polluting the Royal National Park in this manner, what are they doing out of sight in our drinking water catchment?

With the Peter Dupen report we have grounds for concern, and the question is why Planning have not responded.

Catherine Reynolds

Financial Report

INCOME

In the 2022/2023 Financial Year the SSEC generated total income of \$ 18, 507.21 which was made up of:

- \$11,098.00 grant from LEAF Perpetual (Local Environment of Australia Fund)
 - \$710.00 general donations
 - \$ 1,297.15 membership fees
 - \$ 120.00 bird tours
 - \$ 5,282.06 one-month rental income Merton Street, Sutherland
- \$ 18,507.21

Note that only 1 month's rental income was received during the financial year due to the previous tenant vacating the property and the delay in finding a new tenant and signing a new lease. The new tenant is BR NSW/ACT SERVICES PTY LTD, Commencing Date 8 June 2023, Terminating Date 7 June 2025, with an option to renew for a period of 1 x Two (2) years.

Rent is \$65,000 plus GST per annum with annual reviews.

EXPENSES

Overall expenses amounted to \$65,089.45:

- \$ 6,102.18 LEAF Grants funding
- \$ 4,280.00 Legal Advice on Special Strata Fire levy and tenant agreement
- \$23,420.28 Council Rates and Strata fees including Special Fire Levy
- \$ 4,500.00 Repairs & maintenance Merton St. property
- \$17,980.00 Wages
- \$ 1764.00 Superannuation
- \$ 1,630.38 Website maintenance

BALANCE SHEET

The property purchased in 2002 and our bank balance continue to dominate the Balance Sheet of SSEC.

The previous Merton Street tenant vacated the property when the lease expired in mid-August 2022 and the property remained vacant for almost 11 months. During this time some repairs were carried out, such as new LED lighting.

The new tenant moved in on the condition that a kitchenette be installed on the premises. (Previously only a communal kitchenette was available on the floor).

The value of the funds invested with Australian Ethical Managed Funds declined due to the drop in share market and a portion of the funds invested was recalled (30K each fund) to cover running costs until a new tenant was found.

SUMMARY

Despite the above temporary setbacks, the SSEC balance sheet remains in a healthy position.

I wish to express my gratitude to both former and current board members for their unwavering support and encouragement. It has truly been a delightful experience collaborating with this exceptionally skilled group of individuals who willingly dedicate their time and energy to bolster SSEC and further its missions, particularly in these demanding times.

The Board extends its heartfelt appreciation to past and present members and supporters of SSEC, whose backing and foresight have empowered SSEC to achieve financial autonomy.

Lily Meier

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

Profit and Loss Comparison

July 2022 - June 2023

	TOTAL	
	JUL. 2022 - JUN. 2023	JUL. 2021 - JUN. 2022 (PY)
Income		
Distribution from Trust - Australian Ethical Balance Fund – ARSN 9255	0.00	2,185.00
Distribution from Trust - Australian Ethical Shire Fund – ARSN#9166	0.00	4,110.00
Donations	710.00	0.00
General donations	0.00	260.00
Tax Deductible Donations	11,098.00	12,186.00
Total Donations	11,808.00	12,446.00
Fund raising activities	0.00	109.08
Membership Subscriptions	1,297.15	1,018.19
Net Market Value on Investment - Australian Ethical Balance Fund – ARSN 9255	0.00	-12,261.00
Net Market Value on Investment - Australian Ethical Shire Fund – ARSN#9166	0.00	-18,318.00
Rental Income	5,282.06	65,982.06
Service/Fee Income	120.00	1,000.20
Unapplied Cash Payment Income	0.00	0.00
Total Income	A\$18,507.21	A\$56,271.53
GROSS PROFIT	A\$18,507.21	A\$56,271.53
Other Income		
Interest income	55.59	22.38
Miscellaneous	0.00	2,500.00
Total Other Income	A\$55.59	A\$2,522.38
Expenses		
Accounting and bookkeeping	254.47	1,136.08
Auditor's fees	420.00	0.00
Total Accounting and bookkeeping	674.47	1,136.08
Advertising and marketing	235.44	100.00
Bank charges and fees	0.47	49.73
Conferences and seminars	78.39	0.00
Depreciation	0.00	3,018.00
General Expenses	181.82	118.18
Gifts and donations	0.00	10,078.17
Insurance	1,045.16	1,820.16
LEAF Funding	0.00	0.00
Active Transport	45.00	0.00
Bill Ryan Award	0.00	2,000.00
Bob Walshe Writing Award	1,400.00	0.00
Greater Sydney Landcare (Peabody)	3,767.27	0.00
Phil Smith Speaking for the Planet	0.00	4,409.09
ShireCAN	0.00	1,670.73
Discretionary Spending ShireCan	299.00	0.00
Total ShireCAN	299.00	1,670.73
SO Shire	590.91	223.63
Sustainable Business Award	0.00	1,531.82
Total LEAF Funding	6,102.18	9,835.27

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

Profit and Loss Comparison

July 2022 - June 2023

	TOTAL	
	JUL. 2022 - JUN. 2023	JUL. 2021 - JUN. 2022 (PY)
Legal and professional fees	4,280.00	0.00
Meeting Expenses	533.65	59.07
Other Campaign Funding (Non LEAF)	350.00	2,084.54
Postage & shipping	11.82	135.72
Printing, stationery & supplies	187.53	1,166.13
Rates & Strata Fees	23,420.28	13,514.31
Repairs and maintenance	4,500.00	0.00
Shipping, Freight, and Delivery Postage & Handling	139.09	0.00
Storage	854.52	690.92
Subscriptions	923.13	440.97
Superannuation	1,764.00	4,072.71
Telephone & internet expenses	196.29	68.23
Wage expenses	17,980.83	42,043.36
Website	1,630.38	4,360.04
Workcover expenses	0.00	221.91
Total Expenses	A\$65,089.45	A\$95,013.50
Other Expenses		
BAS Roundoff Gain or Loss	-0.34	-1.01
Employee reimbursements	0.00	68.18
Other Expense	0.00	1,090.91
Total Other Expenses	A\$ -0.34	A\$1,158.08
NET EARNINGS	A\$ -46,526.31	A\$ -37,377.67

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

Balance Sheet Comparison

As of June 30, 2023

	TOTAL	
	AS OF JUN. 30, 2023	AS OF JUN. 30, 2022 (PY)
Assets		
Current Assets		
BA Community Access	8,470.47	7,062.62
BA Community Access Card a/c	686.90	608.83
BA Public Gift Fund	20,862.67	14,574.84
Balanced Fund	-30,000.00	0.00
Cash on hand	78.24	78.24
CBA Main Account	0.00	-47.52
CBA Public Gift Fund	0.00	-7.14
Diversified Shares Fund	-30,000.00	0.00
PayPal	476.24	38.36
Other current assets	0.30	0.30
Prepayments	505.00	505.00
Suspense	0.00	-80.00
Undeposited funds	0.00	0.00
Total Current Assets	A\$ -28,920.18	A\$22,733.53
Long-term assets		
Furniture & Fittings - Merton Street	0.00	0.00
Depreciation	-47,366.00	-47,366.00
Original cost	53,168.00	53,168.00
Total Furniture & Fittings - Merton Street	5,802.00	5,802.00
Merton Street at cost	506,353.00	506,353.00
Australian Ethical Balance Fund – ARSN 9255	69,650.00	69,650.00
Australian Ethical Shire Fund – ARSN#9166	65,519.00	65,519.00
Total long-term assets	647,324.00	647,324.00
Total Assets	A\$618,403.82	A\$670,057.53
Liabilities and shareholder's equity		
Current liabilities:		
Accrued liabilities	0.00	0.00
ATO Clearing Account	-4,088.00	226.00
GST Liabilities Payable	4,254.08	4,254.08
PAYG Withholdings Payable	24.00	24.00
Payroll clearing	-233.50	-233.50
Superannuation payable	-166.70	646.70
Total current liabilities	A\$ -210.12	A\$4,917.28
Non-current liabilities:		
CBA business loan	0.00	0.00
Total non-current liabilities	A\$0.00	A\$0.00
Shareholders' equity:		
Net Income	-46,526.31	-37,377.67
Opening balance equity	564,428.81	564,428.81
Retained Earnings	100,711.44	138,089.11
Total shareholders' equity	A\$618,613.94	A\$665,140.25
Total liabilities and equity	A\$618,403.82	A\$670,057.53



We campaign for the environment We advocate for sustainability



Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

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