

WEPA President's Report – 2025 AGM

It's always difficult for the committee to decide what we should devote our limited resources to, and the period covered by this report has been no different. Although we now have an annual planning meeting early each year to help us decide what our priorities should be, the meetings illustrate that we can't do all that we would like with the limited resources available to us.

While the committee has had very little turnover of membership for years, and functions well, we are aware of the need to recruit more members to the committee to better share the work around and take on new projects. To encourage this we are happy for members who may be interested in finding out how the committee operates and the issues we need to consider, to observe our meetings. If you'd like to contribute your ideas, talents or time, but don't have the capacity for a committee role, we welcome any support that members can offer. This might be occasional help with a WEPA event, helping with submissions or writing something for our newsletter. We understand that personal life commitments are the priority, so we aim to make local environmental advocacy a positive experience, not a burden. In either event you can contact us via our website.

One of WEPA's longstanding priorities has been to inform the community about where candidates for election stand in relation to important environmental issues, and during the past year we have done so in relation to the council and the recent national elections.

For the Willoughby council elections, WEPA sent out a survey to all the candidates and reported on their responses via a bulletin to members. The elections resulted in the election of four environmental independents to Willoughby council, of which I am one, under the banner Willoughby Community Independents. This result, along with the defeat of some conservative candidates by WCI and other independents, should result in a more environmentally progressive council.

For the national elections, WEPA and Doctors for the Environment Australia, co-hosted a very successful Meet the Candidates event at the Zenith Theatre on 26 March, attended by around 200. Nicolette Boele (Independent), Gisele Kapterian (Liberal), Louise McCallum (Labor) and Heather Armstrong, representing Harjit Singh (The Greens) introduced themselves, answered five prepared questions, took audience questions, and gave closing remarks - all within 90 minutes. The evening was expertly moderated by Professor Nick Talley, Head of Medicine at the University of Newcastle. And we joined up eight new members at the event!

Another priority is member recruitment. One of the ways in which we do this is by participating in community events which for last year were – National Tree Day, the Fauna

Fair and the Northbridge Baths Centenary. These events not only allow us to talk to people about what we do but allow us to raise awareness about current environmental issues and fundraise through raffles, the selling of wildlife cards and, depending on the event, the selling of native plants.

We have also made it a priority to produce a seasonal WEPA News, which we succeeded in doing in June, September and November 2024, and in February and May 2025, and which have generated positive feedback from members. Then there are the ten or so bulletins published during the year informing members of upcoming events whether organised by us or others, advising members of the responses to the candidates survey, and alerting members to opportunities to lodge submissions on relevant environmental issues.

These efforts haven't come at the cost of WEPA contributing to environmental debate by way of submissions:

- We made a submission to the Nature Conservation Council of NSW in relation to their policy document for the 2024 council elections which helped focus the document on the issues councils can influence and give more coverage to issues specific to metropolitan environmental organisations such as ours
- Our submission to the NSW Legislative Council's *Inquiry into the development of the Transport Oriented Development Program* resulted in me giving verbal evidence to the inquiry and answering questions in July. I said that, while WEPA supported sensible infill and medium density and didn't want Sydney to continue to sprawl indefinitely, we thought the government's proposals would lead to loss of urban tree canopy, an increase in the urban heat island effect, loss of habitat, and impact non-car-based transport options. I also said we supported windfall gain taxes to recover some of the uplift in property values generated by public transport investment to support such investment.
- We also made submissions:
 - to the NSW Government on the *Draft Guidelines for Synthetic Turf in Public Open Spaces*
 - to the *Senate Inquiry into the Nature Positive Bill 2024* looking at changes to the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*
 - to the NSW EPA on their action paper *NSW Plastics: The Way Forward*
 - to the NSW Legislative Council's *Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations*
 - in relation to the Discussion Paper on the *NSW Government's Review of the NSW Companion Animals Laws*
 - in relation to the Department of Planning's proposed changes to the Biodiversity and Conservation SEPP to deter illegal tree and vegetation clearing

These priorities have meant that we have not had as many film screenings or talks as usual. However, we did conduct a very successful webinar in June in relation to synthetic turf. Between the heat generated by synthetic turf fields, the risk of burns, the toxic PFAS chemicals used, and the microplastic waste generated, these fields are becoming an increasing problem in our local environment. At our webinar, Natural Turf Alliance President and Co-founder, Catriona Carver, spoke about these problems arising from the use of synthetic turf in our public open space and answered audience questions.

We also continue to engage with other environmental groups, particularly the peak NSW environmental group, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW; the Natural Turf Alliance, Asian Australians for Climate Solutions and our neighbouring local environmental group, STEP, covering Ku-ring-gai, Hornsby and surrounding suburbs.

WEPA is also represented at the quarterly meetings of the Northern Landcare Network which is an informal network representing groups and organisations involved in ecological restoration and/or the environment.

Finally, I'd like to thank all our committee members for their hard work over the year. Between them they generate all the bulletins, newsletters, events and submissions I've outlined. It's very much a team effort. But I should give a special shoutout to Heidi Key, our indefatigable Secretary, who not only spends an enormous amount of time fulfilling that role but managed, through her work as a keen bush regenerator over many years, to score this year's gong for the Willoughby Environmental Citizen of the Year.

John Moratelli

10 June 2025