

## President's AGM Report 2026

It's certainly been a mixed year for environmental news since our last AGM in June.

It's been a good year for those who savour irony, with Donald Trump telling the UN General Assembly that climate change science is "the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world", acting accordingly domestically, and then inadvertently accelerating efforts to address climate change by attacking Iran.

Let's also hope that the consequent increase in the price of oil will also mitigate the effects of the United States and Saudi Arabia scuttling efforts to place caps on virgin plastic production during negotiations on a global plastics treaty in August.

In Australia the news has been mixed with the Labor government's ongoing approval of major coal and gas projects continuing to disappoint, but the passing of the new Environmental and Biodiversity Conservation Act having some positive aspects. Although The Greens didn't get the climate trigger they were seeking, they did secure amendments to ensure fossil fuel projects do not have access to the streamlined processes and national interest exemptions included in the Act. They also successfully negotiated the removal of the provisions which had allowed for certain forestry operations to be exempt from seeking environmental approval - which should help accelerate the phaseout of native forest logging.

At a local level, after a long gestation, Willoughby Council finally established its four advisory committees, three of which have an environmental focus - Active and Integrated Transport, Sustainability, and Bushland and Natural Heritage - in December. However, this was only after WEPA intervened by sending a letter to the Mayor complaining about the decision taken at the November council meeting to delay the formation of the Sustainability Advisory Committee and the Bushland and Natural Heritage Advisory Committee. This was on the basis that their recommended membership was insufficiently diverse. In this regard one of the things that was particularly offensive was that some councillors had complained that there were too many WEPA members recommended.

Despite this, I'm optimistic that the committees now established will be better supported by Council than they were during the last term.

One local issue which will be of interest to the Sustainability Advisory Committee and members more generally will be the report due to be presented to Council at its June meeting on how Council should revise its Our Green City Plan to meet the more ambitious community emissions target in the overarching Community Strategic Plan. Given the organised opposition to efforts to stop the connection of gas to new dwellings and the requirement to review planning controls as part of the Our Green City Plan review, this will be an important space to watch.

At the organisational level WEPA has continued to thrive.

Our membership numbers are fairly stable with current membership of 153 with 39 in arrears, slightly better than our figures for around this time last year. Those who haven't brought their membership up to date by 30 June will cease to be members, so I encourage anyone you know who may be in that situation to renew their membership.

Our committee has continued to function effectively, holding regular committee meetings, and adding Kay Donovan to our number to fill a casual vacancy. The committee held a successful planning meeting in February.

We've managed to issue regular WEPA News, which have been very positively received, and issued bulletins as needed to publicise upcoming events.

We also worked with Willoughby Council to discourage the use of synthetic spider webs for Halloween, generating some useful media, including Mayor Taylor speaking to ABC702 and an appearance by Kristina Dodds on Channel 9 News.

We made the decision to hold our two public events since the last AGM at the Dougherty Centre as this is more central to the LGA and better served by public transport and this has worked well both in relation to numbers and in attracting people from further afield.

Our first public event was a talk in August by Nick Chapman, the Resilience Officer at Willoughby Council and Alistair Quek the tree officer from Willoughby Council - *The Challenge of Conserving our Urban Tree Canopy* - which was well attended and generated a lively Q&A session. Our second, in March, was a talk by Dr Mark Diesendorf - *Combating threats to climate, environment, and society - why we need system change* - was attended by over 55 people, including a number of members from neighbouring environmental organisations. Dr Diesendorf's talk focused on the challenges posed by state capture of key government agencies, and the media, by powerful interest groups inimical to environmental protection and social justice and what can be done to combat this. Following the talk, WEPA agreed to sign a letter prepared by Dr Diesendorf calling for action to combat state capture to be sent to the Prime Minister.

One recurring aim from our committee planning sessions has been to better engage with our local Asian community. We were pleased, therefore, to help facilitate a presentation by Asian Australians for Climate Solutions on the benefits of induction cooking, by suggesting they contact staff at Council's MOSAIC Multicultural Centre at Chatswood. The result was a very successful presentation in Cantonese in September, which Kristina Dodds and I attended to introduce people to WEPA. Our free wildlife cards were enthusiastically received, and we hope to do more such work in future to raise our profile amongst our local Asian community.

WEPA has also taken part in various public events to publicise our work including National Tree Day in July and the Castlecrag Fair in November, handing out our wildlife cards, and recruiting new members.

We also made a number of submissions (all of which can be viewed on our website) including:

An objection to the Julius Ave Data Centre proposal

On the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority's Rodenticide Review

To Sydney Coastal Groups on the Outer Sydney Harbour Coastal Management Program

Finally, I'd like to thank all our committee members for their hard work over what has been a busy year. Between them they generate all the newsletters, bulletins, events and submissions I've mentioned. It's very much a team effort but held together in particular by our indefatigable secretary Heidi Key.

But I also wish to acknowledge two committee members whose roles are changing: John Pryde who is not standing for a committee position this year but has assisted the committee for many years by supporting Heidi with IT on membership, helping with audio-visual presentations, and doing the agendas for committee meetings; and Gay Spies who is standing for the committee but not for an officer position. Gay was WEPA President for many years and has been Vice-President since I became President over 5 years ago. She's an irreplaceable source of corporate and community memory and it's pleasing to know we'll continue to have access to her sage advice.

John Moratelli 29 April, 2026