

SAVE MILPERRA

THE END OF MILPERRA AS WE KNOW IT

The principle of the land ethic was propounded by the American conservationist and philosopher Aldo Leopold, who wrote in his "A Sand County Almanac" of 1949, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community, it is wrong when it tends otherwise." Without this clear principle in mind any talk of ecologically sustainable development is meaningless at best and fraudulent at worst.

The recent public meeting at Milperra Public School, billed as an 'information night', highlighted the worst of the public concerns regarding the proposed Riverlands redevelopment. The developer's architect provided a quantity of information, but virtually nothing came from Council's own Ecologically Sustainable Development Unit, and this despite the advanced state of the concept which will entail the destruction of over 1,000 trees, the erasure of existing wetlands and remnant woodland communities, and include major road intrusions into endangered river-flat forests with resultant river pollution and destruction of visual and aesthetic amenity. Everyone else can see it, but ESD needs more information.

More informative were comments by the member for East Hills, Alan Ashton, who pointed out that 1,000,000 migrants had come to live in Sydney since 1982, and that he personally wished they'd all moved to Dubbo or Forbes but they hadn't, and that accommodation simply had to be found in Sydney for them, including in Milperra. There in a sentence was the rationale for putting Riverlands under brick and concrete – Milperra is to be seen as part of a political solution to a problem

CANTERBURY-BANKSTOWN
Express
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2006
**Ready to
do battle**



PREPARED: Milperra residents have vowed to stop development of the Riverlands Golf Course. Photo: NICK BLOQUEZ

created by politicians, that of urban overcrowding, an imperative driven by the economic obsession with growth where the community gets the stick and the developer gets the carrot. How long are we going to have to face this situation– to be told in the process that we're selfish for not wanting our neighbourhoods altered beyond recognition, and for not wanting what little there is left of the urban forest destroyed?

In 1986 Neville Wran secured \$2.6 million dollars from the Loan Council to purchase the site of Riverlands for the benefit of everyone, not just for rich investors. The then owners, the Smith Bros, turned the offer down and sold the land privately. Perhaps they were entitled to take the better offer, but our government was clear about its intention which was to retain the land as part of the open space corridor of the Georges River as a broad benefit for the people of Milperra, Bankstown and

Sydney. Those who entered into the deal were well aware of the government's intention.

Now the politicians would prefer to point to an even greater benefit, that of not preserving the land as open space, rather rezoning and subdividing it as a sacrifice to the inextinguishable demands for growth and political expedience. At the meeting Alan Ashton talked tacks in these terms. Ian Stromberg clearly stated that whether he liked it or not, if the Labour caucus favoured the plan then he would be voting for it. He would like to help the residents as he once did, but unfortunately, he's no longer in a position to do so, the reason being he's now a member of a major political party. Alan Winterbottom flew his flag when he said that the people of the Georges River were crying out for marinas. Now there's a man of the people for you!

WETLAND ANNIHILATION PROPOSED AT RIVERLANDS

At the public meeting on the 2nd June at the Milperra Public School, developers explained their proposal to redevelop the Riverlands Golf Course, a plan which will destroy remnant woodland and rare natural wetland that is unique in Bankstown. This wetland complex, if the plan goes ahead, will be destroyed by the alignment of a major new access road, a series of villas and dredging to create a marina on the nearby Georges River.

The proposed plan will destroy the existing freshwater component of an estuarine wetland sequence bordering the river, extending along the alluvial river-flat for almost a kilometre. Extensive areas of mangrove and Swamp Oak Woodland will also be destroyed to make way for a marina and an artificial beach; natural sedgeland and reedland will be eradicated to make way for a reconfigured golf course along the river-flat.

Bankstown Council throughout a long history has systematically annihilated every freshwater creek and channel to the extent where today only scraps of intact floodplain wetland exist. Wetlands have been filled, piped, concreted and drained with what can only be described as a ruthless enthusiasm for the purposes of urbanisation, industrial facility and land reclamation for rubbish disposal.

In recent years in contrast, other councils, notably Fairfield City Council, have spent millions of dollars restoring their creeks and wetlands, removing weeds, de-canalising and restoring natural flows. A classic example in Fairfield is Burns Creek, a tributary of Prospect Creek, where much has been done to restore earthen banks and natural vegetation. The upper section of Burns Creek which is in Bankstown, above Woodville Road, has been treated very differently however. Here it is referred to as the Villawood Drain, and despite comprehensive flora and fauna surveys done in the 1990's, and Council's own initially stated intention to preserve as much as possible of the associated remnant native revegetation, to include a bicycle way along the corridor and re-establish a wetland detention area at Monier Square at Leightonfield, Bankstown City Council's grand contribution to the ecology of this creek so far has been nine million dollars worth of concrete.

So is it all that surprising that Ecological Sustainable Development head honcho Gerry Beasley did not bat an eye when the developer's architect presented the plan overviews on the viewing screen in front of an incredulous gathering of Milperra residents? Gerry Beasley kept repeating that more information was need – to an audience that already knows enough, too much in fact to rest easily.



Waterbird Habitat = private marina



Fairway Forest = 1,100 villas & townhouses



Chain Of Ponds Wetland = access road & villas



Scribbly Gum Woodland = detached dwelling

**Riverlands
Redevelopment
Plan 2006**



1,262 + TREES FACE THE CHOP

Anyone who objected to the removal of 9 trees at East Hills Park and 22 trees at Armour Park will be staggered to learn the number of non-planted, site-indigenous native trees facing destruction at Riverlands. The tally of 1,262 was reached by the developer's environmental consultant but probably does not take into account many of the Grey Mangrove and Swamp Oak trees that will be removed from the Estuarine Forest.

It will inevitably be said that various trees will be planted in their place, but no planted tree has or can have the same intrinsic values of non-planted indigenous trees which are living historical links with the pre-settlement past. No development has threatened to destroy so many trees in Bankstown for decades, perhaps not since the site for the Bankstown Aerodrome was cleared in the 1940's. The Smith brothers had the foresight to retain so many trees to line the fairways. The diversity of trees to be found on the site is truly remarkable: Forest Red Gum, Cabbage Gum, Scribbly Gum, Ironbark, Blue Box, Grey Box, Coast Grey Box, Thin-leaved Stringybark, Red Mahogany, Rough-barked Apple, Narrow-leaved Apple, Paperbark and Swamp Oak: remnants of the river-flat and Cumberland Plain Woodland that once dominated the Georges River Floodplain.

Every one of these trees provides forage for native insects, mammals and birds, and many are old enough – {200+ years} to possess nesting hollows for Laughing Kookaburras, Eastern Rosellas, Crimson Rosellas, Red-rumped Parrots, Rainbow Lorikeets, Brush-tailed and Ring-tailed Possums and Micro Bats. These trees still have long years of life in front of them: they provide the existing suburbs of Milperra with valuable wind-breaks and aesthetic amenity.

Any trees that are not destroyed outright during construction will have a very limited future once they are surrounded by brick, concrete and tar: there simply will not be room for them to grow or to shed branches safely as they presently can where they line the fairways of the golf course. The wildlife that depends on these trees too will disappear, and the beautiful fairway forests will be replaced by stingy brick-boxed ornamental gardens of azaleas and dwarf-conifers of little appeal to wildlife.

If this is desirable, then as a society we must have our environmental values upside down. It can not logically be called ecologically sustainable development when the starting point is the complete destruction of the ecology.

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVELOPER: THE MILPERRA FRONTLINE

Despite what Gerry Beasley and others say, this development proposal is well advanced and could be taken out of the Council's hands sooner rather than later. The Councillors answer directly to the people of Bankstown but the Minister for Planning does not, and he knows nothing and cares less for Milperra, its present day attributes and the values of its residents.

The Minister will likely see this plan as a golden opportunity to cram 1,100 habitable lots on the Sydney side of the Georges River. Remember it is the Minister for Planning who is charged with the job of foisting the yoke of over-development on the rest of the community in order to accommodate ever-increasing populations and economic growth.

Australia manufactures less and less as this sector dwindles. To make up for it we dig up or chop down anything we can to ship overseas. We ship our forests to Japan for a pittance, and there are mountains of coal and uranium to sell to communist China. To partly offset the downturn in manufacture, employment and profit are promoted through building, the need for which is boosted by high immigration rates. There is however no evidence of high population increasing Gross Domestic Product per head, but to politicians it is simply pragmatism to show favour to the building and development lobbies that back them, regardless of environmental costs.

The public meeting on 2nd of June was reminded that the developer has a lot of money invested in the project, as though we had some kind of moral obligation not to complain when the chainsaws start bringing the trees down: its alright, someone is making a lot of money from it. Why should the people of Milperra care about the developer's money when the developer puts so little value on the things they value, the things money can't buy, like a peaceful neighbourhood and the shade of trees that have stood for a hundred years, and the beautiful birds that flock to their blossoms?

It is barely credible that Council claims it needs more information for it to form an opinion on this environmentally destructive proposal. No councillor or local politician has as yet spoken out against it. Clearly their sympathies lie with the developer.

Do not be lulled into thinking the decision-making process will be long and drawn-out. Numbers are being crunched already. Council has referred the proposal to the Department of Planning to be identified as an 'investigation area' on the Metropolitan Development Program, so it is now on their books as an agenda item. This action was carried by Council unanimously and clearly indicates the way they are leaning.

However long it does take from here on, the day will come too soon when the residents of Milperra will wake to hear the chatters of Lorikeets drowned out by the bawl of chainsaws and earth-moving equipment. People have a right to make a stand to protect their community and their environment. We cannot pretend otherwise that the frontline is drawn at Milperra.

SAVE DEEPWATER PARK

THE FUTURE OF DEEPWATER PARK

The Riverlands developers have their sights set on running a new roadway through Deepwater Park. This is a disastrous prospect for the endangered river-flat forest in the location. To date Council has been mute on this subject. Deepwater Park is one of our most unique open space parks, but what is happening to it? Council has closed Maxwell Avenue, as well as the car parks for the picnic area at the end of the road. This has restricted access to people wishing to picnic on the river-flat.

Recently it was announced that the ornamental rainforest at the end of Maxwell Avenue is to be removed because it is incompatible with the conservation values of the endangered river-flat forest. We contend that the main section of the rainforest is not a threat to the greater part of the river-flat forest. Through neglect the rainforest has filled with weeds such as wandering jew because the area was planted, mulched and then ignored. The weeds can be cleaned up by basic bush regeneration methods so it is not necessary to cut the whole rainforest down. The rainforest is not necessarily incompatible with the river-flat forest, but the proposed road to link up with the Riverlands development site by way of passing under the M5 most definitely is.

The Riverlands developers have no claim to any part of Deepwater Park. A through road would be the death of Deepwater Park. Eventually another access could involve an upgrade of Webster Street. A caravan park has also been mooted. The decimation would then be complete.

The wildlife park at Blue Gum Farm is gone and the Vietnamese farmers have left the market garden. In place of these will be Skirmish Paintball and Put-Put Golf. Add a caravan park and a golden highway to the Riverlands gated city and it all adds up to the commercialisation of more public space. Deepwater Park is full of rare plants, many of which are being choked to death by weeds like wandering jew and bridal creeper. The boardwalk is dilapidated, the natural environmental values are neglected while Council chases business opportunities. Councillor Winterbottom says a road through Deepwater Park will be good because it would be nice to have some street lights down there. It would be a tragedy if this sort of simplistic thinking were to prevail over the values of the natural environment.



Proposed road corridor through river-flat parkland at Deepwater Park

*** Field inspection of the Deepwater Park river-flat forest with bush regeneration activities to be conducted by Bankstown Bushland Society on Sunday 15th October. All welcome. Meet at the end of Webster Street, 9.30am. Guides Colin Gibson, Darryl McKay. Ph 9788 6232**

This information sheet is supported by Bankstown Bushland Society, South West Enviro Centre, Georges River Environmental Alliance and Milperra Action.

Future additions of the Milperra Information Sheet will appear as occasional supplements with the Bushland Bulletin, the newsletter of BBS. For further information contact Ph 9785 2374.