



Welcome to the newly elected OFF Committee for 2020. Our President, Graham Lalchere, stood down after 7 busy years in that position and Vice-president Kim Wagstaff, was elected to take his place. We especially welcome three new committee members – Adrian Polhill, Sonia Baxant and Brian Dale – they come with fresh ideas and will be invaluable to the running of OFF.

SUMMARY OF PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS 2020: Graham Lalchere

At the recent AGM, Graham stated that this will be his last presidential address as he is standing down as it is time for someone new to fill the position and refresh the role. He then thanked his fellow committee members, saying that the President's role is one of coordination, as it is the committee members who manage the society and come up with the ideas, the plans and carry out our activities.

As well as the continuing committee members, he also thanked those standing down: Peter Mahoney, Peter de Beuzeville and Anne Cale for their contributions, as well as continuing position holders. A special thanks was offered to past committee member Shaun Keys-Byrne, who is leaving the district. Shaun has been instrumental over the years in assisting with the development of much of our publicity material.

For his last address Graham briefly discussed the OFF-mission statement, which consolidates the society's aims as follows: **Working to protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment locally and globally.** This is carried out by following the society's objectives, as outlined below. He then clarified the mission statement in detail and illustrated it with examples.

- **Protect.** *Defn:* To defend from trouble, harm, etc.
This is the first level of ensuring our environment is cared for, and at the very least, make sure what we value does not disappear.
- **Preserve.** *Defn:* To keep safe from danger of harm; to protect from decay or dissolution.
This is the second level of care for the environment. So that what we value may be protected, and not allowed to deteriorate.
- **Enhance.** *Defn:* To intensify or increase in quality, value, etc; improve, augment.
This is our third level of environmental care. We build on the first two and advance our care of our environment and begin to ameliorate past damage.
- **Local.** *Defn:* Characteristic of or associated with a particular locality or area.
This is where our primary work is carried out. We work in our own area to ensure our local environment is suitable for both ourselves and other essential organisms.
- **Global.** *Defn:* Covering or relating to the whole world; comprehensive.
This is where we operate outside our local area, or our local efforts have an effect outside our locality.

Graham then reiterated that OFF has been **working to protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment locally and globally since 1955.** The full address will be published on the OFF website.

THE SECRETARY'S REPORT: Liz Cameron

Liz highlighted the good work conducted by the society over the last year.

- OFF canvassed local candidates in the State election for their position on key environmental protection principles and posted responses on our website.
- We handed out flyers and talked to voters on environmental issues in Oatley and Mortdale before State and Federal elections.
- OFF representatives regularly met with GRC Mayor and senior staff to discuss issues including Oatley Bowling Club site, Urban Forest and Tree Management Policies, compliance with building DAs,

management of Lime Kiln Bay wetlands, and the Streamwatch program.

- We made submissions on some GRC draft strategies. OFF made submissions on the Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall, Moorebank Intermodal West Concept Plan, Snowy 2.0 Main Works EIS, Cruise Ship Terminal in Yarra Bay and Re-zoning of land near Helensburgh for residential development.
- We liaised with many environmental organisations including NPA, Give a Dam Alliance, Protect Our Water Alliance, Reclaim Kosci, and Sutherland Shire Environmental Centre.
- OFF fielded two Bushcare teams each month – in Oatley Park, and in other reserves where we planted natives.
- OFF members and supporters planted more than 3,000 native trees, shrubs and grasses and invested over 600 person hours. We obtained bushcare grants totalling \$8,000 from Federal and State governments.
- Members did Streamwatch sampling, ran a Clean Up Australia site (25 people), and took action on Graffiti Removal Day. Our Streamwatch and bushcare work benefited from GRC Councillor Ward Discretionary Funds.
- We allocated \$6,000 for three post-grad student grants in 2019, up from \$4,000 in 2018. Three past recipients spoke at OFF meetings about their projects.
- Meeting attendance averaged 45. Popular topics were Australian drylands, and feral horses in Kosciuszko NP (David Eldridge), the natural wonders of Western Australia (Alan Fairley and Kim Wagstaff) and Jayden Walsh's presentation on frogs and reptiles.
- Nine field outings averaged 15 participants (up from 2018); most popular outing was the history cruise on the Hawkesbury River. 23 OFF members spent a week in the Tasmanian Tarkine. The annual summer trip to Kosciuszko NP was cancelled because of bushfires.
- The Annual Dinner in July was attended by 41; the raffle raised almost \$250. And 21 people attended the December Picnic.
- We successfully nominated Melina Amerasinghe for a Banks Volunteer Award, and Melissa Derwent and Deb Andrew for St George Community Environmental Achievement Awards.
- Our stall at Oatley Lions Festival promoted koala protection and reduction in plastics; we ran a children's craft activity and sold Oatley calendars and native plants. We had three more stalls before Christmas in Oatley and Mortdale. OFF has set up a credit card facility to take cashless payments.
- We prepared a promotional presentation on OFF history and activities to show to other local organisations.
- In 2020 we will hold our meetings in the RSL Sub-Branch hall where air-conditioning has been installed, instead of downstairs in the RSL Club.
- Membership remains close to 300.

Sadly, four members died during the year – John Winters (President in the late 1990s) and his wife Lesley, Alan Argall (who joined in 1977), and Hugh Stacy.

MEETING WITH GRC COUNCIL OFFICERS

On 31 January 2020, OFF committee members met at Lime Kiln Bay with Georges River Council's Andrew Latta - Executive Manager, Engineering Operations, and Erin Fardy - newly appointed Bushcare Team Leader. This meeting resulted from the quarterly meeting between OFF, Mayor Kevin Greene, and senior GRC officers on the preceding Wednesday.

An inspection was made of the poor state of the ponds. They discussed the need for an overall review, with the aim of improving the operation of the wetland. More discussions will take place within two weeks once Council officers have studied the situation. OFF has also raised this issue with Mark Coure - Oatley MP, to obtain necessary state government support for the project.

24 February 2020 - Presentation on Transitioning to Sustainable Farming by Vince Heffernan

This meeting will feature Vince Heffernan, a lamb producer who in the last 15 years has converted his father's conventional sheep farm into a sustainable farm based on biodynamic principles. See www.moorlandslamb.com.au. Vince is also Chair of the Upper Lachlan Landcare Group, an ecologist and regenerative agriculture advocate. He is based in Dalton and comes to Sydney 1-2 times each month to sell his outstanding produce at Eveleigh Markets.

1 March 2020 - Clean-up Australia Day. This year OFF will be cleaning up the edges of Lime Kiln Bay. Meet at Jinna Reserve, South Peakhurst (at the bottom of Pamela Avenue) any time between 8.30 am and 12.00 noon. Bring waterproof shoes, hat and gloves.

8 March 2020 - Paddle Against Plastic. Georges Riverkeeper has invited OFF to participate in this event – paddlers will be cleaning up Salt Pan Creek and OFF will have a stall. Meet at 49 Clarendon Road boat ramp, Riverwood at 10.00 am. Bring own canoe or hire from Ocean Crusaders (book in advance). Link to the event: www.georgesriver.org.au/news/georges-river-clean-paddle-against-plastic-event.

15 March 2020 - Walk Heathcote National Park. A medium grade walk, descending to Heathcote Creek, then following tracks to Tarnaroo Ridge. This walk goes through an area we don't often visit but is well worthwhile experiencing. As this area was not burnt by the recent fires, it is likely that there will be a lot of wildlife particularly birds that have escaped and are using this park as a refuge. Also, a lot of plants are flowering at present, probably in response to recent rains after hot weather. Walk will start at 10.30 am meet at the end of Abbott Road Heathcote (about 500m from Heathcote Railway Station, so travel by train is a practical alternative to driving). Bring lunch and drinks. Leader: Ian Pitt. Tel: 0410 709 935

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Sub-Branch Hall, 25 Letitia St, Oatley) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and field days.

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

OATLEY PARK BUSHCARE group is on the second Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 pm. Meet at the entrance on Oatley Park Avenue. New participants welcome, please contact John Kensett - GRC Bushcare Officer, m: 0435 963 643

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings. New volunteers always welcome.

LOCAL BUSHCARE Members can assist by volunteering to maintain OFF planting sites on the fourth Thursday of each month at 8.00 am. On Thursday 27 February, we will be working at Lower Gannons Park, off Vale Lane, Peakhurst.

REZONING PLAN FOR HELENSBURGH

The Society has written to Wollongong Council objecting a proposal to rezone part of Lady Carrington Estate on the upper Hacking River at Helensburgh. The letter pointed out that this area has been under consideration for environmental protection for 40 years and in 2010, OFF stated that "any private subdivision and development of this land would pose serious threats to the wildlife of the area and the water quality of the Hacking River". But developers continue to seek to overturn the zoning.

Protecting the headwaters of the Hacking River is even more important in 2020, given the recent bushfires, as the area is a key wildlife corridor between Royal National Park and bushland south of Helensburgh. The construction of houses would pose an extremely high bushfire risk and require adjacent forest to be cleared frequently, destroying natural habitat beyond the footprint of the proposed development.

Pictured: Water stations, food and rags being transport to the south coast for wildlife relief.



BIRD-FRIENDLY RODENT CONTROL

Birdlife Australia has produced an informative brochure on the dangers of rodent baits for native animals, especially for birds of prey which can eat poisoned rodents. It suggests ways of making bird-friendly changes to minimise our impact. For details, visit <http://birdlife.org.au/rodent-control/>

PROTECT OUR WATER ALLIANCE

This group is fighting against proposals to expand longwall mining south of Sydney. The Illawarra is the only place in the world where longwall mining is allowed under a vital community water supply. To find out more, visit www.protectourwateralliance.org.

Kim Wagstaff reported at the AGM on a tour by OFF members on 2 February 2020, of some areas in Sydney's water catchment that are impacted by longwall mining. There is a pending inquiry into an application to extend the mining operations and that will be an opportunity for OFF to make a submission.

SPOTTED AT MOORE RESERVE WETLANDS

In early January 2020 a pair of Latham's Snipe (pictured), a Striated Heron, Baillons Crake, Buff-banded Rail, White-eyed Duck, Little Grass-bird, Clamorous Reed Warbler, were seen at the Moore Reserve Wetlands. Observations by David Waterhouse.



2020 ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

OFF annual subscriptions are now due
Subscription is still only \$25 per person or family (living at the same address) for the year.