

Towards a More Sustainable Future



A Summary of Trends Issues and Key Ideas

Paper No 14a
Blue Mountains – Our Future



March 2002



Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
WHERE WE ARE NOW	6
What You Said In Surveys Focus Groups And Workshops	6
What Other Research Is Telling Us	6
WHERE WE ARE HEADING	8
What The Research Is Telling Us	8
WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?	9
Your key ideas for looking after the environment in the future	9
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	10



Introduction

Our health, welfare, and enjoyment of life depend in fundamental ways on the systems of nature surrounding us. Yet we often see evidence that these vital systems have been compromised by our own actions--consciously or otherwise.

There is much debate about environmental change and to what extent it is influenced by human impact. However it is generally agreed that a number of underlying key determinants can drive environmental change, such as the physical environment (e.g. climate, soils, water availability and biodiversity) and human-induced changes (e.g. population, the consumption of natural resources and applications of new technology).

The concept of a "ecological footprint" used internationally is one method of assessing the extent of a population's impact on the environment. The ecological footprint has been described as a measure of the impact of direct and indirect consumption of resources and production of wastes on the environment. The ecological footprint can provide some insight into the links between consumption and population patterns, and their environmental impacts and sustainability.

Consumption is an issue at the global, national and local level. The pressures of a continually expanding global economy and population are felt across national and international borders. International markets fuel the trading of natural resources and other material goods and services, including information, between nations. These markets can also accelerate consumption pressures as industries supported by governments seek to expand market opportunities for their products, services and capital. (NSW, SoE)

The key elements of urbanisation that exert pressure on the environment (both locally and regionally) and influence the liveability of human settlement are population numbers and distribution, conversion of land to urban uses, high levels of resource consumption, and waste generation by the population (World Resources Institute et al, 1997).



In the Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains natural environment is spectacular. However it exists in a fragile relationship with the people who live here and the footprint they make.

Urban development in the Blue Mountains is sited at the top of Sydney's drinking water catchment. Protecting water quality from the impacts of urban runoff and pollution is critical to conserving streams and drinking water values. Leaking septic, exfiltration and overflowing sewers have a major impact on water quality.


Costs of mitigating cumulative impacts on this fragile environment are prohibitive particularly in the case of managing urban runoff, sewage and water quality.

Many different government and non-government agencies are involved in the management, use, development and protection of the Blue Mountains natural environment. A key challenge will be ensuring a co-ordinated response from the different agencies involved and that costs are fairly apportioned.

This unique natural environment contributes immeasurably to the cultural setting and economy of the Blue Mountains. With World Heritage listing, management of the Blue Mountains environment is now of national significance. The 1.03 million hectare Greater Blue Mountains Area has been listed as a World Heritage area because of its globally outstanding biodiversity and vegetation dominated by Australia's unique eucalypts. One of the challenges for a City within a National Park in a World Heritage area is to prevent impacts on the natural values of international significance.

Another challenge is that the Blue Mountains is one of the most bush fire prone areas in Australia. Recent bushfires again highlighted the ever present threat to property and personal safety from our bushland / urban interface and the design and construction of many of our houses.

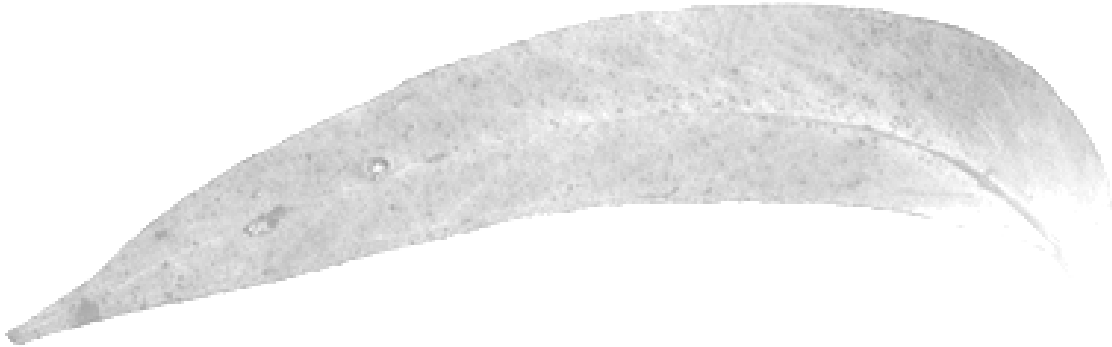
The Blue Mountains Local Government Area is generally unsuitable for extensive development. Over the years there has been continuing pressure for the development of unsuitable areas together with a growing demand on already inadequate services and infrastructure.



Many of the present day environmental problems in the Blue Mountains are the result of older premature subdivisions. Most existing development is along a transport route set in the 19th century and in many cases has had little regard for environmental management issues. (BMCC SoE, 2000)

There are increasing pressures on the natural environment from urban development and land clearing, waste, weed invasion, stormwater runoff, degraded lands and building of roadways.

How can we live in harmony with our natural environment?






Where we are now

What you said in surveys focus groups and workshops

- There are impacts on the environment from human settlement and development in the Mountains
- Controlling development to minimise environmental impact is your major concern overall for the city (BMCC, Community Survey 2001)
- You want the environment to be protected
- You are concerned about the impact of population on the environment
- You want more sustainable tourism with less impact on our World Heritage National Park
- You want the community to be more educated and informed about environmental issues such as how to identify and eradicate weeds
- You want more recycling and better waste management
- You want the Council to be a model for environmental sustainability

What other research is telling us

- Choices about how we live impact on the environment (Australia, State of the Environment 2001)
- The existing pattern of low density and dispersed settlement on a bushland interface contributes to instances of water pollution, soil erosion, weed infestation and feral animals impacting on bio diversity and water quality (Blue Mountains, State of the Environment 1999/2000)
- Weeds and their causal agents are considered to be one of the greatest threats to biodiversity and ecosystem function in the Blue Mountains. There are over 400 weed



species in the Blue Mountains with at least ten being highly invasive (Blue Mountains State of the Environment, 1999/2000)

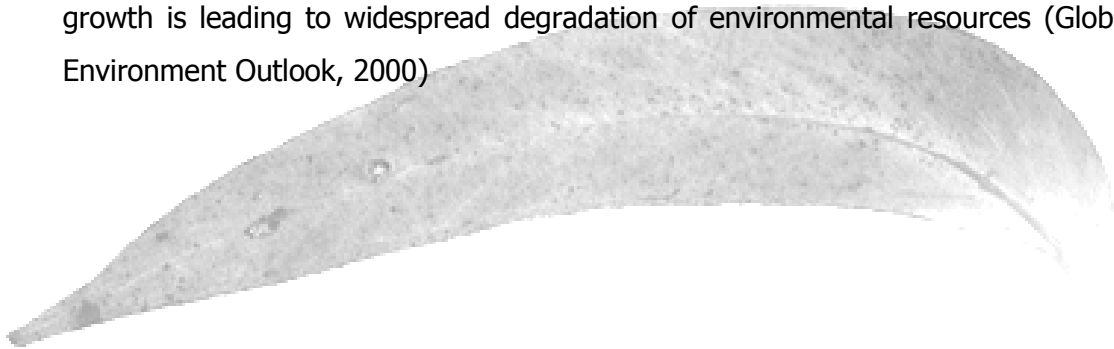
- The rate of domestic waste in the Blue Mountains continues to increase although at a reduced rate (Blue Mountains, State of the Environment 1999/2000)
- Pressures contributing to degradation of water quality, in the Blue Mountains include:
 - ⇒ Sediment from erosion of degraded land getting into streams
 - ⇒ Pollution from Sewage Treatment Plants and Waste Management Facilities
 - ⇒ Addition of pollutants from diffuse sources such as 'urban runoff', sewerage overflows
 - ⇒ Extraction of groundwater for irrigation and other uses (Blue Mountains, State of the Environment, 1999/2000)
- The Blue Mountains Urban Runoff Control Program initiated in 1996 with \$15 million from the State Government has sealed 50 roads reducing annual sediment into local creeks by an estimated 1800 tonnes (Blue Mountains State of the Environment, 1999/2000)
- In affluent cities, such as many of those in Australia, it is not the growth in population that has the most significant impact on the environment so much as the increasing pattern of overall resource consumption (World Resources Institute et al. 1996)
- NSW residents and the Australian population as a whole are comparatively high consumers of resources and producers of waste (NSW, State of the Environment 2000)
- Air and water pollution is increasing with growing impacts on daily living in urban areas (poor air quality affecting asthma sufferers and water supplies being contaminated) (State of the Nation Report, 2000)



Where we are heading

What the research is telling us

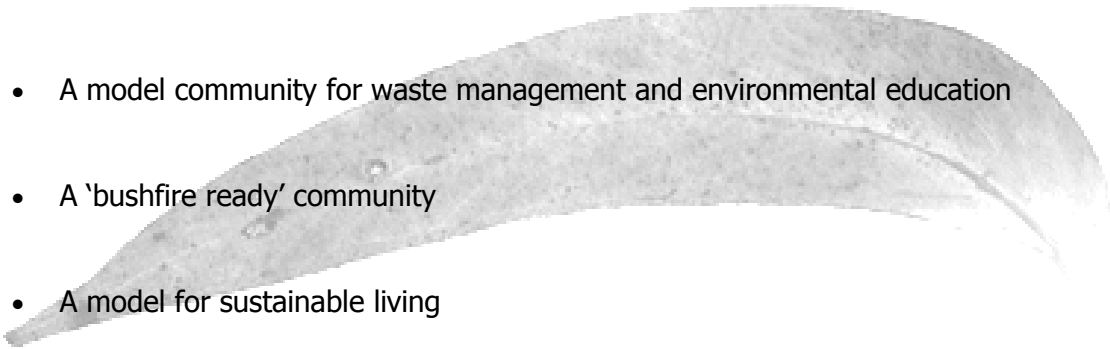
- A tenfold reduction in resource consumption by industrialized countries is a necessary long term target if adequate resources are to be released for the needs for developing countries (Global Environment Outlook, 2000)
- Within the next 5 years it is estimated significant areas of land will be infested with weeds in the Blue Mountains (BMCC Waste Services, 2002)
- In many parts of the developing world poverty combined with rapid pollution growth is leading to widespread degradation of environmental resources (Global Environment Outlook, 2000)





Where do we want to be?

Your key ideas for looking after the environment in the future

- The Blue Mountains is renowned for its environmental management practices
 - Emphasis on protection of the environment with the community involved in regeneration and water watch programs (etc)
 - Urban expansion is limited and the impacts of urban areas on the environment is reduced
 - Communities are much more environmentally aware than those at present, and are less focussed on material consumption
 - The people conserve materials and energy in the way they live
 - A model community for waste management and environmental education
 - A 'bushfire ready' community
 - A model for sustainable living
- 



Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- The Blue Mountains is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world
- The recent World Heritage listing makes it even more imperative for us to preserve biodiversity
- The population of Sydney relies on us for their clean drinking water
- Blue Mountains residents have high consumption and high waste generating lifestyles

Opportunities

- World Heritage status enables an integrated framework for the management of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area
- There is an international requirement for government to provide additional resources for protecting the values of World Heritage Area
- The Blue Mountains can become a model of best practice for fire prevention building design
- Additional funding may be available from other levels of government to protect water catchments providing Sydney residents with their drinking water
- The Blue Mountains can become a centre for environmental education
- Blue Mountains as a model community for waste management and recycling