

Centenary and District Environment
Action Incorporated

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IN THIS ISSUE

Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of
the Westlake Riverhills Bushcare
Group (WRBG) – 5 pages

The next CDEA Public Meeting is
being held on **Saturday morning,
25th February, 2023**, at the **Pooh
Corner Environment Centre**, 100
Wolston Road, Wacol.

PROGRAM:

- 7.30am **Guided Walk** – Pooh
Corner Bushland Reserve
- 9.00am Welcome & Morning Tea
- 9.30am **Ed Parker**, Vice-President
of CDEA, will present
“Focus on Local Wildlife:
A photographer’s
perspective”.
- 10.00am General Meeting

FREE!

Public invited!

Bring your friends!

Centenary and District Environment Action (CDEA) advocates on behalf of local residents in environmental issues. The following article celebrates a positive outcome in which riverside bushland was in danger of being destroyed by a commercial developer. This is one of a number of successful campaigns related to retention of bushland. In this issue, we will concentrate on an early example of the power of citizen action.

CELEBRATING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WESTLAKE RIVERHILLS BUSHCARE GROUP (WRBG)

(Ed Parker & Vaughan Kippers)



Westlake Riverhills Bushcare Group inaugural joint leaders, Ed Parker (standing to left of banner) and Maree Norris (standing to right of banner) with some of the WRBG team, October 1998.

Background Information

In late **August 1991**, **Save Our Riverfront Bushland (SORB)**: see <https://sorb.org.au/>) was formed by local residents, becoming the first environment-focused community advocacy group to arise in the Centenary Suburbs in south-western Brisbane.

SORB formed as a committee of concerned Centenary Suburbs residents as a result of an on-site public meeting on **Sunday, 1 Sep 1991** held to express concern at the commencement of clearing of remnant riverfront bushland along the Brisbane River’s Pullen Reach in Westlake.



It soon became evident that this was unapproved pre-emptive clearing, having been initiated by the developer just weeks prior to Brisbane City Council's enactment of its first vegetation protection laws. The photo on the next page shows the bushland prior to the commencement of clearing.

SORB's original objectives were to act for protection of remnant bushland, retention of public access to the Brisbane River riverfront, and adequate provision of public open space in the Centenary Suburbs.

SORB's advocacy resulted in the cessation of exclusive riverfront subdivisions which alienated public access to the river.

In **1993**, SORB established **Westlake Riverhills Bushcare Group (WRBG)**, a community based bushcare group under the Brisbane City Council's Habitat Brisbane Program (as the program became known in later decades). As the first of many more bushcare groups now operating in the south-western suburbs of Brisbane, WRBG commenced its bushland rehabilitation work along Pullen Reach of the Brisbane River shown in the aerial photograph.



Aerial photograph showing the riverfront bushland in Westlake, on the eastern side of Pullen Reach, prior to the commencement of clearing. (circa 1989/1990)

2 Westlake Riverhills Bushcare Group (WRBG) has continued to operate, under various changes of leadership over the decades, and will celebrate its 30th anniversary this March 2023.

The inaugural WRBG bushland rehabilitation activity occurred on **Sunday, 21 March 1993**, with residents **Maree Norris** and **Ed Parker** taking on the joint leadership of the group. WRBG commenced operating under the relatively new **BCC Bushland Care Program**, led by Ms **Jenny Leask** and support officer Mr **Mike Noble**.

Prior History – up to the formation of WRBG

In **late August, 1991**, the developer, Australian Housing and Land (AHL), commenced pre-emptive clearing of Brisbane River riverfront bushland in Westlake, which was undertaken with no development approvals in place.

In response, Maree Norris and Ed Parker mobilised local residents to protest this clearing, commencing with urgent planning for a public meeting. Media reports were also initiated.

On **Sunday morning, 1 September, 1991**, a public meeting was held at the corner of Bibras and Barcoorah Streets, with about 100 local residents in attendance. Notably the Lord Mayor, **Jim Soorley**, attended. In his speech, he referred to the clearing as “vandalism”, and committed to bringing the clearing to a halt. Councillor **Christine Watson**, Jamboree Ward, was very supportive in bi-partisan unity with the Lord Mayor.



Jim Soorley, Labor Lord Mayor of Brisbane (1991-2003)

Towards the end of this period, the Lord Mayor wrote a letter, distributed to local residents, announcing a Jobskills Land and Environment Action Program project and informing them of his support of local residents' bushland rehabilitation.

As part of the Lord Mayor's letter to residents, he stated that as part of a "\$10 million employment scheme to provide work for 1,000 of the City's young jobless" ... "a team of 8 young people will rehabilitate the Westlake Riverfront."

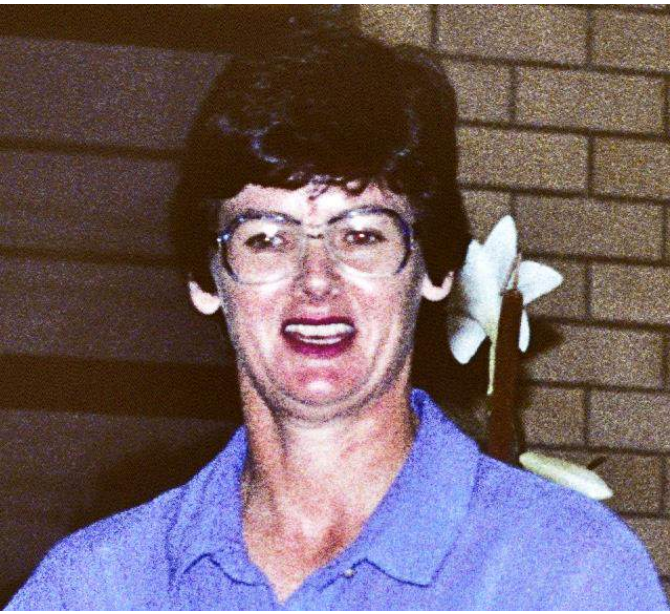
"The Westlake riverfront area will be reserved for public use as part of the open space contribution of adjoining residential development. In the process of development, much of the significant bushland was destroyed. The Council negotiated a significant area as public land for use and enjoyment by local residents. Now as part of its commitment to greening the city, the Council will support the efforts of local residents to rehabilitate these public areas."

"Council's Jobskills team will support the local community group by controlling erosion, revegetating the disturbed areas, establishing a walking track along the riverfront and constructing signs to inform residents of the efforts of the local community."

On **Sunday, 21st March, 1993**, WRBG held its inaugural event attended by over 20 residents, after which SORB put out a press release: "Once again Centenary residents have demonstrated their commitment to bushland retention and rehabilitation", says Ed Parker, SORB representative, "vindicating Council's actions to have the riverfront preserved for the public".

"BCC's Bushland Care Liaison Officer, Jenny Leask, informed the gathering that SORB had mounted a strong and well-documented proposal and project plan. The viability of the plan was attested to by Council's approval of the scheme for funding under the Bushland Care Program."

"Ms Leask, and colleague Mike Noble, led residents in a walking tour of the bushland, demonstrating bush rehabilitation techniques, plant identification and weed control."



Christine Watson, Liberal Councillor for Jamboree Ward (1991-2000).

Save Our Riverfront Bushland (SORB) formed as a residents' advocacy group, with an inaugural committee consisting of **Maree Norris, Ed Parker, Walter Wood** and **Maria Delahunty**. The initial objectives were as stated in the preceding background Information.

During **September to December, 1991**, follow up action by Lord Mayor Jim Soorley included:

- Calling for the developer, Australian Housing and Land (AHL) to immediately cease the land clearing;
- Foreshadowing that the Brisbane City Council (BCC) would protect the riverfront bushland from future subdivision, and;
- Arranging for BCC Environment Branch head, **Peter Nicholls**, to meet with AHL, with the intention being to walk the site and define a line for the westerly limit of a future subdivision.

In **January, 1992**, Lord Mayor Jim Soorley announced that 2.7km of Brisbane River riverfront and creek corridor bushland in Westlake and Riverhills would be protected, which was a total area of over 12 hectares.

During **February to December, 1992**, Brisbane City Council negotiated with AHL to establish a framework for volunteers to start work under the BCC Bushland Care program, prior to the future protected bushland transferring into BCC ownership.

WRBG History – March 1993 to present (2023)

March 1993 – February 2002:

During this period, the WRBG joint leaders were **Maree Norris** (until 2008) and **Ed Parker** (until 2002). Typical attendance was 8 – 15 persons with about 25 on the group contact list.

In its first decade, WRBG operated as follows:

- Monthly working bees, first Sunday of the month, Feb – Dec each year.
- SORB continued to issue newsletters with WRBG updates. Refer website for issues #6 Nov 1996 to #13 Mar 2001: <https://sorb.org.au/resources/#news>
- Newsletter letterboxed to ~700 local addresses for first few years, until distribution was ceased when there was little evidence of volunteer recruitment through that channel.
- Balaton St noticeboard was utilised once installed in the early 1990s.

Other specific activities and events from this decade are detailed in the following.

1993/1994:

Barry Jahnke from the **Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP)** kindly agreed to undertake a botanical survey of the Pullen Reach bushland. Ed Parker, on behalf of WRBG, collated the survey data into a database, which provided a baseline survey of native vegetation and weed species to inform WRBG activities.

1994-1998

During this period, staged residential subdivision development progressed up to the bushland protection line announced in Jan 1992. This completed the current street system between Balaton St and Tennent St.

See

<https://sorb.org.au/resources/nl09/index.htm>

<https://sorb.org.au/resources/nl11/index.htm>



Barry Jahnke (left) receives the Queensland Natural History Award for 2009 from the Queensland Naturalists' Club (QNC) Past President, Dr Brian Lowry. (Photo © Peter Woodall)

1995/1997:

Various jobs programs were coordinated by BCC, which supported various Jobskills providers and the volunteer efforts by WRBG.

1996

During 1996, SORB/WRBG went live with a website: <https://sorb.org.au> .

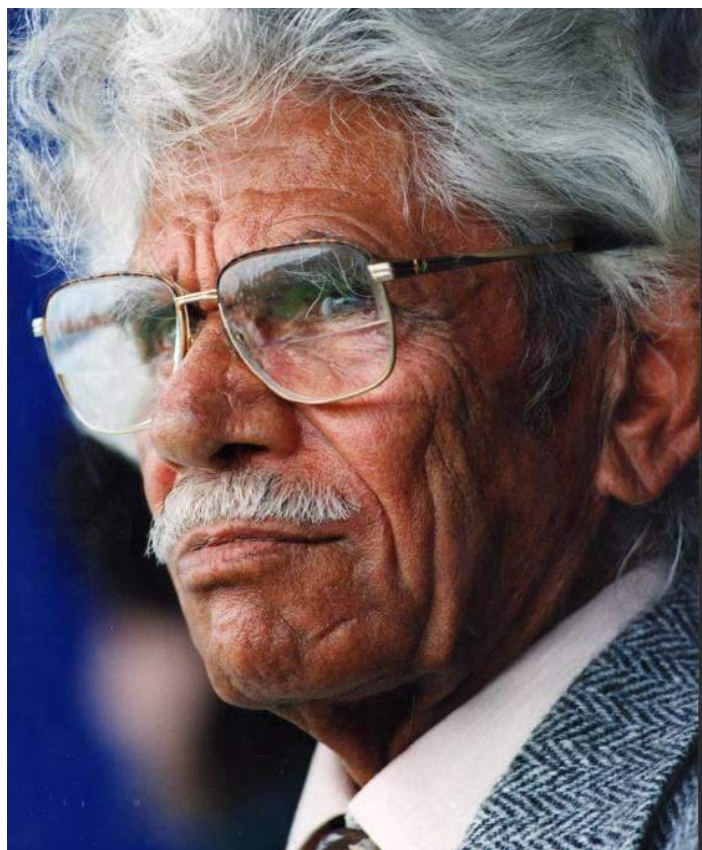
WRBG was successful in obtaining a \$5,000 state government grant through the **Brisbane River Management Group (BRMG)** for a Site Analysis Report. **Rob Friend** was engaged as the environmental consultant to undertake and publish the report.

<https://sorb.org.au/resources/nl06/index.htm>

The report was another important outcome to document the natural values of the site and to assist council and WRBG management of the bushland.

1997

Young aboriginal workers on a Jobskills project alerted their supervisor, **John Nightingale**, that Uncle Neville needed to inspect the Coucal Trail sandstone escarpment and its cave. Former Senator **Neville Bonner** visited the site and declared to WRBG reps and the work team that it was a "significant site" – a place visited a couple of times a year for initiation ceremonies.



Neville Bonner AO (1922–1999) was the first Aboriginal Australian to become a member of the Parliament of Australia. He was a Senator for Queensland from 1971 to 1983.



The Big Fig Tree near northern end of Coucal Trail (Photo © Ed Parker, August 2002)



Gary Goldsworthy and working bee loading the Centenary Riverfront Advisory Committee trailer near the Big Fig Tree (Photo © Ed Parker, August 2002)



Plaque at northern end of Coucal Trail, commemorating formation of the Coucal Trail as part of the “Breaking the Unemployment Cycle” Program jointly funded by the Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council (Photo © Vaughan Kippers, 8:50, 21 January 2023)

WRBG second decade

2002 – 2014

In March, 2002, after a decade in the role, **Ed Parker** handed over reins to a new leadership team consisting of **Gary Goldsworthy** and **Rob Murray** as joint leaders. WRBG continued monthly working bees, on the second Sunday of the month, during Feb – Dec each year. Membership numbers waned during WRBG’s second decade, to typically 6+ core group members.

WRBG third decade

2015-2018

In about 2015, **Sandra Austin** became the WRBG group leader and led a small working group for several years until late 2018.

On 18 December 2018, **Ed Parker, Glenda Parker and Shealagh Walker** (group leader of **Jindalee Bushcare Group, JBG**) attended a site meeting with Habitat Brisbane Officer **Paul Devine**, regarding interim contractor support arrangements pending recruitment of a replacement volunteer group leader.

2019

In April, 2019, in the absence of finding a replacement group leader, **Ed Parker** agreed with HBO **Paul Devine**, to step in as interim leader to prevent the group folding. Joint BCC and WRBG planning was undertaken, with the aim of re-invigorating WRBG

On **Sunday morning (10am-12noon), 19 May, 2019**, with **Ed Parker** as WRBG group leader, a public Habitat Brisbane information session was held on site for new volunteer recruits. The program included a welcome and introduction by Paul Devine and Ed, a guided nature walk along Coucal Trail, followed by refreshments and networking.

2019 – 2021

In **June 2019**, monthly working bees were recommenced with a core group of about 6 volunteers and over 30 on a contact list. A local cub/scout group was invited to attend several sessions and has continued to support WRBG activities periodically.

In **March, 2021**, **Nicole Johnson** became the group leader of WRBG, which continues operations under Nicole's leadership with monthly working bees, second Sunday of the month, February – December each year.

WRBG fourth decade

In **December, 2022**, **Nicole Johnson** reviewed the year (abridged here): "Despite floods, plant tube stock shortages, vandalism of 15 plants, 3 events being cancelled due to inclement weather and illness, and other challenging circumstances, in 2022 WRBG volunteers planted over 141 native plants and contributed over 152 hours, early on the second Sunday of each month. ... Our large site along the Coucal trail, by the Brisbane River, is extensive so we have been strategic on focussing on the high ground at the key

6 entrances, especially since some weeds still play a critical role in habitat, microclimate and erosion control.

As a result of our efforts, and with Council assistance, WRBG volunteers have been able to clear Creeping Inch plant through manual weeding and spraying at the southern end near Balaton St, manually reduce Mother of Millions and Mile a Minute generally along the trail, and greatly reduce Coral Berry and Creeping Cinderella, at the Tennent St end. We removed strangling vines such as Brazilian Nightshade, Corky Passion Vine, Madeira Vine and Balloon Cotton Bush. We removed some environmental weed trees such as Chinese Elms and our battle to stop the spread of Curry Leaf Tree and Coral Creeper continues.

Of the new vegetation planted, locally specific to the area, there were native Kangaroo and Barbed Wire grasses, Blue Flax Lilies, Barbed Wire Vines, Native White Hibiscus, Cockspur, Tuckeroo Trees, Native Coffee Bush and Holly, Whalebone Trees, Purple Coral Pea, and Mutton Wood Trees. Even more exciting is seeing the self-seeding of native grasses, trees and other vegetation, especially Wombat Berry and Scrambling Lily. If we can't identify the species we research and leave well enough alone until all is confirmed."

There is also more detailed information about the history of the Westlake Riverhills Bushcare Group on the CDEA website at <https://www.cdea.org.au/cdea4/index.php/general-information/category/10-wrbg30> where there are an additional seven documents.

In March 2023, **WRBG will celebrate its 30th anniversary with a planting session on Sunday 12th March 2023.**

Is this the only example of local residents saving bushland for future generations? The short answer is "No" and the long answer will be in the next (April) Newsletter.