# News of Friends of Grasslands

Volume 1 Issue 6

16 February 1996

can you lend a hand with the conference?



### \$8,000 grant for FOG conference

In the March 1995 issue of the newsletter we said we had sought a grant (under the Save the Bush component of the National Landcare Program) to run a grasslands conference for non-experts in Spring 1996 in Canberra.

We have received the full \$ 8,000 we asked for, and are now pulling out all the stops to get a stunning conference together for November this year in Canberra.

As with all conferences, there is a huge amount of work to be done over the next nine months. We have already put in several months' preparatory work on the conference structure, guest speakers, venue selection and so forth.

But now that the cheque has actually arrived, we must crank up the pace considerably and go into overdrive. This is a fabulous opportunity to influence key sectors of the community in south-east Australia, especially those who are not grassland experts but whose actions affect grasslands.

We would like to involve FOG members in this important event. Could you help with some aspect of the conference planning and organisation?

Areas in which we would love your help include -

- speaker liaison
- venue liaison
- corporate sponsor liaison
- designing the conference leaflet
- promotion and advertising
- coordinating displays and demonstrations
- field trip coordination
- audio-visual coordination
- budget and financial oversight.

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If you can spare even a little time, please phone Susan Theron on (06) 274 1831 w, (06) 281 4725 h.

## NSW clearing controls: SEPP 46

On 10 August 1995 the NSW Government created State Environmental Planning Policy No. 46 (SEPP 46) under the (NSW) Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 to control clearing of grasslands and other native vegetation in non-urban areas.

On 13 December 1995, a mere four months later and under extreme pressure from the NSW Farmers' Association, the Premier of NSW announced the repeal of SEPP 46 for grasslands pending the development of Regional Grassland Plans.

Those plans had to be assessed and accredited through the NSW Vegetation Forum by 16 February 1996, said Mr Carr, or grasslands would be re-introduced into SEPP 46.

The Forum, a sub-committee of the (NSW) State Catchment Management Coordinating Committee, is chaired by the Director General of the NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation.

Regional

Forum

Grassland Plans

considered by

Its members include representatives of the NSW Farmers' Association, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Agriculture, Greening Australia, Local Government and Shires Association, Total Environment Centre and Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

During January 1996 Regional Grassland Plans for the Cooma-Monaro Plains, Hay Plains, Liverpool Plains, Moree Plains and Walgett Plains were drawn up by regional coalitions of catchment management committees, Landcare groups, shire councils, farmer groups and others.

A (NSW) Grassy Ecosystems Reference Group (GERG) had been recently formed as a source of advice to the Forum on grasslands. Its members include representatives of the NSW Farmers' Association, NSW Agriculture, Total Environment Centre and World Wide Fund for Nature Australia.

The Regional Grassland Plans were considered by GERG at its inaugural meeting on 8 February, and by the Forum on 9 February.

#### FOG's response

On 17 December FOG issued a Media Release expressing deep concern about the repeal of SEPP 46, and warning the NSW Premier not to abandon native grasslands. The release stated that unless the Regional Grassland Plans provided 'full and permanent security for all lowland native grasslands with conservation value', FOG would be arguing strongly for the reintroduction of SEPP 46 for grasslands.

On 3 February FOG visited two high conservation value grassland sites in the Monaro region of NSW (in the Yaouk Valley and near Bredbo) and found they had been partially cleared.

On 6 February FOG forwarded a detailed submission to the Forum, setting out what FOG considered to be the minimum performance characteristics which the Forum should require of Regional Grassland Plans, and reporting on the clearing of the above sites.

On 9 February FOG delivered to selected members of GERG and the Forum a critique of the Regional Grassland Plan for the Monaro region. FOG criticised the plan for

being a purely voluntary self-regulation scheme with no compulsion for landholders to comply, and for concentrating on grasses to the exclusion of other grassland plants and grassland animals.

#### **Understanding farmer concerns**

For anyone wanting to know why SEPP 46 for grasslands was so vehemently opposed by the NSW farm lobby, *The Land* newspaper during the period August 1995 to February 1996 makes instructive reading.

FOG can certainly sympathise with farmer concerns over potential loss of income as a result of clearing controls on grasslands. Indeed FOG has argued publicly (including in the pages of *The Land* and in its submission to the Forum) that all Australians - not just rural landholders - should share the cost of conserving Australia's biodiversity, including the cost of protecting grasslands.

However FOG has been deeply concerned by farmer allegations in *The Land* that grassland scientists are simply wrong.

The NSW farm lobby has argued that grasslands are in fine shape, and that suggestions that only 10,000 hectares remain in anything like natural condition in south-east Australia are patently false. The implication was that the NSW Government had effectively fallen prey to city-based greenie propaganda, and that the notion that grasslands were in trouble was an environmental hoax.

FOG wonders whether such allegations may stem in part from a communication gap between farmers, who seem to define grasslands as 'grasses', and scientists who view grasslands as a complex ecosystems made up not only of grasses but of large numbers of non-grass plant species and animal species.

Either species-rich grasslands are flourishing all over NSW but scientists have somehow missed them despite extensive searching over many years, or else farmers are referring primarily to the small number of persistent hardy native grass species which hang on despite agricultural disturbance long after more sensitive grassland species have disappeared.

FOG will continue to look for opportunities to better understand farmer concerns, and to

two Monaro sites partially cleared try and communicate scientists' concerns to farmers and other sections of the community.

FOG members span city and country, and include farmers and other rural landholders as well as grassland scientists, agricultural experts and many other sectors. What unites FOG members is a desire to support and protect Australia's temperate lowland native grassland ecosystems, and to ensure their continued survival.

#### The outcome

None of the Regional Grassland Plans submitted to the NSW Vegetation Forum were accepted by it at its 9 February meeting.

FOG understands that after that meeting, negotiations were urgently begun to develop an agreed state-wide addendum which would form a standard minimum requirement to all the plans. If agreement could be reached on a satisfactory addendum, the aim was to have all plans accepted (with that addendum) today - 16 February 1996.

Will that addendum provide full and permanent security for NSW lowland native grasslands with conservation value?

As this newsletter goes to press, the fate of NSW grasslands hangs in the balance. Spare a thought for the grassland ecosystems whose future hinges on these negotiations.

What is needed is not a win for scientists or conservationists or farmers, but a win for the grasslands themselves.

# ACT State of Environment Report

The ACT State of the Environment Report 1995, which was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 26 October 1995, gave strong and extremely welcome prominence to grassland issues.

The report concluded that 'The ACT has the opportunity to save its remaining grasslands, but that opportunity is disappearing fast' (p 131). It recommended that the ACT Government should -

- amend planning laws to specifically prohibit development on grasslands (p 150)
- introduce legislation making it an offence to clear or damage grasslands without approval from a statutory body which would assess the application using ecological principles (comparable to South Australia's Native Vegetation Act 1991) (p 150, 131).

On the root causes of flora and fauna decline generally, the report stated 'There is no denying that increasing human population is currently the biggest direct and indirect threat to the ACT's plants and animals. Without government moves to set an upper limit or to restrict the impact of increasing population, this threat will continue to grow' (p 141).

The report recommended that the ACT Government should -

- determine how many people the ACT can support without further decline in the region's ecosystems (p 141-142)
- adopt policies to ensure that population does not rise above this level and to ensure that no additional plant and animal habitat is taken by urban expansion (p 142).

On 29 October FOG issued a Media Release calling on the ACT Government to adopt all of the above recommendations.

The ACT State of the Environment Report 1995 is available from ACT Government shopfronts for \$20. It was prepared by the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment in the ACT (telephone (06) 207 2626) with input from various expert Reference Groups.

# NSW State of Environment Report

By contrast, temperate lowland grasslands barely rate a mention in the NSW State of the Environment Report 1995, which was published in October 1995 by the Environment Protection Authority of NSW (telephone (02) 795 5000).

ACT report seeks end to clearing and population growth ----

'invisible' in

NSW report

grasslands

Why are grasslands virtually invisible in that report?

Having been acknowledged by the federal Environment Minister, Senator Faulkner, as Australia's most threatened ecosystem, one would expect that the EPA would give some prominence to lowland grasslands in a 380 page biennial report.

FOG will be writing to the NSW Minister for the Environment, and to the Chairperson and Director-General of the NSW EPA, to ask that the next NSW State of the Environment Report (expected in late 1997) focus more on grasslands.

FOG will be providing the Minister with a copy of the ACT State of the Environment Report 1995 to help illustrate the type of issues that FOG believes it would be beneficial for the NSW report to explore.

# Federal State of Environment Report

The inaugural federal State of the Environment Report is expected to be published in about May this year.

The head of the Federal Government's advisory council on the report, Professor Ian Lowe, has promised (in an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November 1995 p 1) that the report will not pull any punches and will 'tell it like it is'.

If Professor Lowe is as good as his word, there is hope that the plight of lowland grasslands could get a strong mention in the report.

Hope springs eternal that the core factors driving grassland loss - including human population growth and clearance of native vegetation, both of which FOG highlighted in its June 1995 newsletter - will be faced squarely in that report.

### **Other SOE Reports**

FOG's limited resources have prevented us scouring the State of the Environment Reports published by other states for mention of grassland issues.

But if you have done so, we'd love to know the results. Which states are being up front about lowland grasslands and grassy woodlands in their SOE or other major reports? Indeed we're keen to know of grassland developments generally in your state - government policies, research findings, courses and conferences, grassland books, agricultural issues, community action, whatever you think is newsworthy and relevant to the conservation of lowland grasslands and grassy woodlands.

FOG now has members in NSW, the ACT, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia. And although we're doing our best to cover news from beyond NSW and the ACT, we don't yet have 'cub reporters' outside Canberra. Please forward any contributions or ideas for the newsletter to FOG's post office box (see back page) marked 'Attention: Newsletter Editor'.

## ACT endangered community nomination

Although the precise details are still confidential, FOG understands that lowland grasslands have been nominated to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee for possible listing as an endangered ecological community under the (ACT) Nature Conservation Act, and that several grassland species have been nominated for consideration as endangered or vulnerable species.

A recommendation from the Committee on those nominations is expected to go to the ACT Minister for Environment, Land and Planning in the near future. If the Minister were to agree to such listings, that decision would then go before the ACT Legislative Assembly as a disallowable instrument.

The listing of grasslands as an endangered community, albeit in a tiny region like the ACT, would be an important breakthrough in the legal and policy treatment of lowland grasslands by state and territory governments.

Here's hoping for a favourable outcome. We'll keep you posted.

### NSW threatened species law

The (NSW) Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 was passed in December 1995 and took effect on 1 January 1996.

ACT grasslands as 'endangered ecological community'?

The good news for grasslands is that the Act provides for the listing of endangered ecological communities, as well as endangered and vulnerable species, and that insects and other invertebrates are included.

FOG understands that although several grassland species have been listed as endangered or vulnerable species, no grassland (or grassy woodland) communities have yet been listed.

An introduction to the Act will form part of a seminar being offered by the Total Environment Centre on Sunday March 31 in Kent Street, Sydney, from 9 am to 4 pm.

The seminar, entitled 'New Laws on Threatened Species, Energy and Waste', is aimed at community groups and green councillors. The fee for the seminar is \$40 and bookings should be made with the Total Environment Centre (telephone (02) 247 4714, FAX (02) 743 7200, 1/88 Cumberland Street, Sydney NSW 2000).

Copies of the Act can be purchased from the NSW Government Information Service (telephone (02) 743 7200), either over the counter or through their telephone mail order service.

### Earless Dragon babies in the news

A handful of tiny newborn Southern Lined Earless Dragons (*Tympanocryptis lineata pinguicolla*) must have wondered what all the fuss was about when Capital TV's news team surrounded them with cameras and microphones last week.

'Tymp' expert, Art Langston, of the University of Canberra found a clutch of five dragon eggs in grasslands at 'Woden Property' near Canberra recently. This is an Australian first - eggs of this particular Tympanocryptis species have never before been found.

Art discovered that the nest containing the eggs had already been disturbed and, fearing that the dragons would therefore not survive in the wild, he took them back to the university.

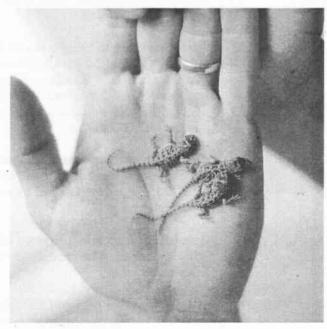
In another Australian first, Art then successfully incubated and hatched the eggs in captivity.

The first four dragon babies emerged unassisted from their eggs over the weekend of 3-4 February. The fifth emerged on 6 February with human assistance, having got stuck half way out of its egg.

The first four were released back to the wild as soon as their media engagements were complete. The fifth was not well enough to release immediately, and remained under observation. It has now recovered and it, too, is back in the wild.

Our thanks to Art and the University of Canberra's Public Relations Unit for use of the accompanying photograph.





### FOG Canberra field trip 23 March

Dave Mallinson is coordinating a series of visits to the Barton Cathedral site in Canberra, to see if we can help the remnant grasslands there through seed collection or other practical onground activities.

At this stage Dave has in mind visiting the site once a month, beginning on Saturday 23 March 1996 at 10 am.

If you are interested in being part of this activity, please telephone Dave in week commencing 18 March to check on arrangements. Dave can be contacted on (06) 250 9512 w, (06) 231 4327 h.

FOG turns one

'One what?' you might ask.

But seriously we felt FOG's first birthday was worthy of celebration, particularly to say thankyou to all those who have supported FOG so warmly since our launch in November 1994.

An informal lunch was held at the Australian National Botanic on 26 November 1995, preceded by a talk by Art Langston on satellite remote sensing as a tool for detecting grasslands.

FOG owes a great deal to many people, but none more than to Sarah Sharp of the ACT Wildlife Research Unit.

It was Sarah who sold the Society for Growing Australian Plants (Canberra Region) on the need for a Friends of Grasslands group, who convinced SGAP Canberra to take on the task of organising the launch, and who secured funding for SGAP to do so.

Sarah has also been exceptionally generous in providing much needed advice and encouragement to SGAP and to FOG, and we owe her a great deal.

Space does not allow us to mention all those who have helped and supported FOG over the last year.

However the following is just a sample of the many to whom special thanks are owed: SGAP Canberra, the Australian National Botanic Gar-

dens, World Wide Fund for Nature Australia, the Australian Network for Plant Conservation, John Benson of the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, David Shorthouse and team at the ACT Wildlife Research Unit, Geoff Butler of the Conservation Council of the S-E Region and Canberra, Art Langston and Dr Will Osborne of University of Canberra, Dr Ted Edwards and Dr Ebbe Nielsen of CSIRO Entomology, Rainer Rehwinkel and others at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, John Lumb of ANCA, and the National Museum of Australia.

Thanks are also due to FOG's new President, Sandie Jones, who officially took over the reins at the birthday lunch. Sandie is recovering from glandular fever, but will resume her role as President as soon as she is well enough.

### Launch of new grasslands book

On 13 December at Parliament House in Canberra the federal Environment Minister, Senator Faulkner, launched Australia's most threatened ecosystem: the south-eastern low-land native grasslands by Jamie Kirkpatrick, Keith McDougall and Michael Hyde.

Published by Surrey Beatty and Sons in association with World Wide Fund for Nature Australia and with the support of the National Estate Grants Program administered by the Australian Heritage Commission, this book has been adapted from WWF's 1994 publication Conservation of Lowland Native Grasslands in South-eastern Australia.

The new book is less technical than its predecessor, offering an inexpensive (around \$17) and somewhat more accessible introduction to lowland grasslands. It includes colour photographs and line drawings, but omits the details of particular sites which appeared in the 1994 book.

Launching the book, Senator Faulkner promised to send a copy to all local government councils in south-east Australia.

The book can be purchased by mail order directly from Surrey Beatty using the order form enclosed with this newsletter, or over the counter from Surrey Beatty stockists including:

 Melbourne - Greens Bookshop (Flinders Lane), Andrew Isles Natural History Books (Prahran), Mason's Book Centre (Tullamarine)

Barton

visits

Cathedral site

Senator Faulkner launches grasslands book

- Sydney Australian Museum Bookshop (College St), Royal Botanic Gardens Bookshop (Mrs Macquaries Rd)
- Canberra Australian National Botanic Gardens Bookshop (Clunies Ross St), Bogong Bookshop (Environment Centre, Kingsley St), Dymocks (City Walk).
- Adelaide Dymocks (Rundle Mall)
- Brisbane Billabong Bookshop (City Plaza, Ann St), Peter Pal (Slacks Creek)
- Perth Boffins Bookshop (Hay St).

FOG was invited by the Australian Heritage Commission to provide tubs of live grassland plants at the launch, and our thanks go to David Taylor (Yarralumla Nursery) and Leon Horsnell (Native Nooks) for lending us the beautiful specimens from which we composed those arrangements.

### Upcoming courses and conferences

### Grass identification course from 13 March 1996, Canberra

In Canberra the Australian National University's Centre for Continuing Education is offering a course on identifying local native and introduced grasses using a hand lens and botanical keys. No prior experience is required.

Led by freelance botanist and grasslands consultant, Isobel Crawford, the course consists of four Wednesday evening sessions (7-9 pm) beginning on 13 March, plus a field trip on Saturday 30 March. The fee is \$ 85.

To obtain an enrolment form, contact the ANU Centre for Continuing Education:

telephone (06) 249 2892 or (06) 249 2888

FAX (06) 249 5938

Email cce.secretary@anu.edu.au mail Freepost 355

Centre for Continuing Education
ANU Canberra ACT 0200

Early enrolment is recommended as places are limited and the course starts in three weeks.

#### Wild grasses of Victoria course November-December 1996 Victoria

In Victoria Dr Graeme Lorimer offers a variety of mid-summer courses which cover wild native grasses, as well as wild introduced grasses.

These courses range in duration from just a few hours to eight sessions over four weeks, and cover topics such as species identification, propagation, land management, habitat and ecology, and conservation of rare species.

The courses are tailored to suit the needs of various different sectors including farmers, Landcare groups, government agencies, the general public, and landholders who have nature conservation covenants on their land or wish to pursue nature conservation on their land. No prior botanical knowledge is required, and most courses include field trips.

This coming summer Graeme hopes to run courses in Melbourne, north-east Victoria, Bairnsdale and possibly other areas. Prices vary depending on the length of the course, but as an example a 1995 course of four evening classes and four half-day field trips cost \$ 110 (\$80 concession) including course notes and suppers.

If these courses interest you, we suggest you get onto Graeme's mailing now so that Graeme can contact you directly as soon as course details are finalised.

Graeme can be contacted as follows:

Dr Graeme Lorimer 42 Gratten Road MONTROSE VIC 3765 telephone (03) 9728 5841

### VX111 International Grassland Congress, June 8-19 1997, Saskatchewan, Canada

Themes cover issues such as forage, cropping, climate change, biodiversity, temperate and tropical native grasslands, grasslands in arid and semi-arid regions (including sustainability of native pastures), and integration of environmental and agricultural policy (including alternative green payment approaches for conservation).



with
Graeme Lorimer, Ph.D.



To find out more, contact the congress organisers at -

PO Box 4143
Station C
Calgary, Alberta
CANADA T2T5M9
(Email: amc@Supernet.ab.ca)

- or contact FOG (see back page) and we'll mail you an outline.

### advance notice of GERG 1996 research grants

#### Other courses or conferences

If you know of other upcoming courses, seminars or conferences on grassland-related issues which you think would be of interest to FOG members, we'd love to hear about them. Reports of past conferences are also welcome.

Please forward details to FOG's post office box (see back page) marked 'Attention: Newsletter Editor'.

### **Grant opportunities**

### **National Landcare Program**

If you or your group have been thinking about seeking a grant under the National Landcare Program, now is the time to check the closing date for your state or territory (closing dates vary from February to April 1996) and start planning your application.

The community component of NLP has several strands, including -

- Land and Water rural projects
- Save the Bush remnant vegetation projects
- Natural Resources Management Strategy within the Murray-Darling Basin.

Funding is available for activities which help rural and urban communities work on natural resource management and nature conservation problems in their local areas. Activities may include -

- community awareness and training
- vegetation and wildlife habitat on-ground actions
- resource inventory (survey and mapping)

- planning and monitoring
- investigation, trials and demonstrations.

### Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group (Victoria)

The Research Advisory Group of the Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group (Victoria) sought applications late last year for grants to support research into the conservation and management of native grassland and grassy woodland communities in Victoria.

Although preliminary applications had to be received by 31 December 1995, similar grant opportunities are expected to arise in 1996 and 1997. \$ 40,000 has been allocated towards such projects this year, and similar amounts are likely to be available in the following two years.

The Research Advisory Group is particularly interested in project grants up to \$8,000 per annum. Smaller grants will be encouraged, and larger grants may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The broad subject areas considered a priority for research projects are :

- management techniques for the maintenance or enhancement of biodiversity
- invasion by pest plants and animals
- economic and social factors in the maintenance of native grassland and grassy woodland areas
- restoration and regeneration of communities and habitats
- issues related to the viability of sites and genetic conservation.

The Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group is a cooperative approach by government and nongovernment organisations to facilitate grassland conservation in Victoria. Funding for this grant scheme is provided by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency.

# NLP grants

closing soon

For further information contact:

James Ross Victorian National Parks Association 10 Parliament Place East Melbourne VIC 3002 telephone (03) 9650 8296.

### WWF seeks Monaro Grasslands Officer

World Wide Fund for Nature Australia has recently advertised for a part time Monaro Remnant Native Grasslands Officer for 12 months, to be based in the Cooma area.

WWF is seeking someone with knowledge of native grasses to work with local agencies and communities to conserve publicly owned sites by providing information and assistance with management planning.

That person will work for WWF with the advice of regional organisations represented on the Monaro Remnant Native Grasslands Advisory Committee.

Applications closed four weeks ago, and an appointment is expected shortly.

### **Australian Grass and Sedge Study Group**

If you are a member of your local Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP), you are eligible to join the Australian Grass and Sedge Study Group.

That national group is one of many specialist native plant study groups coordinated by the national umbrella body to which SGAPs all round Australia belong.

The group's aims include conservation and management of grassland areas, and use of native grasses and sedges in landscaping.

Membership is only \$ 3 per year, which includes having the group's newsletter mailed to you several times a year.

To find out more, contact:

Matt Pearson, Leader Australian Grass and Sedge Study Group PO Box 2089 Normanville SA 5204 telephone (08) 379 2651.

### Plants of Melbourne's Western Plains

Speaking of SGAPs, last year SGAP Keilor Plains Group published a book entitled Plants of Melbourne's Western Plains: a gardener's guide to the original flora.

Containing a foreword by the federal Environment Minister, Senator Faulkner, highlighting the importance of the lowland native grasslands and grassy woodlands of the plains west of Melbourne, this book is more than just a gardener's guide.

It provides an introduction to the geology and natural history of the area, with strong emphasis on the benefits of conserving and using local species, before turning to the cultivation and landscape use of particular plants, and environmental weed issues. Colour photographs of a number of species are included

Information on plant suppliers, Friends groups in the region and further reading is also provided, making this book excellent value at under \$ 10.

The book is available from SGAP Keilor Plains (telephone (03) 9336 3228 ah) and from selected bookshops, including the Australian National Botanic Bookshop in Canberra.



### **Executive Committee contact details**

President: Sandie Jones

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Convenor: Naarilla Hirsch 30 Chillagoe St FISHER ACT 2611

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Jan Gough-Watson

RMB 1025 BUNGENDORE NSW 2621

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Janette Hannan

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Phil Hurle

10 Fraser Place YARRALUMLA ACT 2600

phone (06) 285 4231 h

FOG membership now totals 189

Please note FOG's new contact details:

FRIENDS OF GRASSLANDS
PO Box 987 CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608
telephone (06) 254 6759