

**ITEM 14 NOTICE OF MOTION - COUNCILLOR CATH BLAKEY - WOLLONGONG BUSHCARE**

Councillor Cath Blakey has submitted the following Notice of Motion –

“I formally move that Council –

- 1 Note that Bushcare, Dunecare, Landcare and Fire Ready volunteers make an important contribution within the community and to our environment.
- 2 Recognise that the Wollongong Local Government Area includes over 60 Bushcare and Dunecare group, 8 Fire Ready groups and 8 Landcare groups. The number of volunteer Bushcare and Dunecare groups supported by Council has recently been capped, with any new enquiries being directed to existing groups.
- 3 Congratulate Growing Illawarra Natives on their new WEA course “Wollongong’s Wonderful Plants!”.
- 4 Write to the new federal Environment Minister noting the decline in funding to Landcare Illawarra and advocating for a resolution of funding for Landcare and other practical ecological restoration works.”

**Background provided by Councillor Cath Blakey:**

Wollongong Council’s Bushcare program has been operating for over 30 years ago as a practical means for residents to be involved with weed reduction, planting trees, shrubs, grasses and herbs, maintaining track access and clearing litter on public land. The aim is to restore our natural areas as wildlife corridors and conserve native vegetation. Dunecare and Fire Ready programs have also developed, with the later encouraging residents to help reduce the risk of bush fires by removing weeds and maintain buffer zones. Locations include creeks and wetlands, rainforests, the escarpment, coastal dunes and headlands. During 2019-2020 there was a total of 7616 volunteer hours worked on the Wollongong City Council Bushcare, Dunecare and Fire-ready sites valued at \$228,510. The value of this contribution is leveraged by Council in grant applications as ‘in-kind’ contributions. Over the last few years, the size of natural areas under council management has grown as subdivisions proceed in West Dapto.

Wollongong’s Wonderful Plants! is an initiative of the Growing Illawarra Natives volunteer group. The Growing Illawarra Natives website promotes the cultivation and use of plants native to the Illawarra region. It catalogues hundreds of local species with a searchable function by site exposure level, plant type, ecological zone, wildlife habitat and uses. The website is 100% developed and maintained by volunteers. It was launched in March 2020, after five years of preparation. The Wollongong Botanic Garden utilises the Growing Illawarra Natives plant database in their Greenplan sale plant list. The website can be viewed at <http://blog.growingillawarranatives.org/>.

Landcare is identified as one of Australia’s longest running environmental movements, unifying landowners, farmers and the community for practical environmental benefits. Landcare Australia reported in May 2022 that annual federal funding for Landcare has fallen to below the 1997 level. In the Illawarra this has resulted in a reduction to the Landcare Illawarra staffing and resources. Nevertheless, Landcare Illawarra’s website is host to the Illawarra Remnant Bushland Database that was previously hosted on the Southern Council’s website.

Doug Humann, chairman of Landcare Australia, has reported that

“Not only do Landcare partnerships improve environmental health, but the report addresses at length the benefits Landcare provides for our personal and collective wellbeing.

A KPMG survey of more than 1,000 Landcare volunteers and coordinators from Landcare groups found that involvement in Landcare lead to approximate savings from avoided healthcare costs of \$403 per individual per year.”