

HAWKESBURY GAZETTE VOL. 113 No. 50 WEDNESDAY 8 AUG 2001

# Council goaded on clearing

• by Gail Knox

HAWKESBURY City Council is set to be a laughing stock if it fails to properly deal with a tree-clearing incident at Kurrajong Heights, according to Green councillor Leigh Williams.

And Cr Williams has called for Council to impose the full weight of the law on the offending Kurrajong Heights landowner - Alex Lister.

"I don't want to crucify him, but if Council doesn't enforce its Tree Preservation Order when there's clearly a breach of that regulation, then it's worthless and gives a green light for anyone else to do what Mr Lister has done," Cr Williams said.

"If we don't do something we'll make Council a laughing stock."

As reported in The Gazette of July 18, Mr Lister had cleared more than one hectare of land along the ridge of his property at 1213 Bells Line of Road.

Mr Lister's neighbour Dr Stephen Larkin told Council at its July 31 general purpose committee meeting he had stopped the tree clearing operations when he returned to his home on May 21. Dr Larkin said the contractor told him his instructions were to clear the three-hectare property.

Cr Williams also took issue with the report on the tree clearing prepared by Mr Lister's environmental consultant Danny Wotherpoon, which he said "belittled wattles as regrowth. They're very valuable vegetation," Cr Williams said. "They're protecting the soil and are an important food source for a range of wildlife."

Dr Larkin, who has approval to build a conference facility on his property, told The Gazette yesterday his primary concern was to defend his property. "Which I've had to do because of the perceived apathy of Council



• Environmental consultant Richard Wells points to the land cleared, with, from left, councillors Dianne Finch and Leigh Williams, environmental consultant Dr Trevor Hawkeswood, and far right, Dr Stephen Larkin.

in regard to tree clearing," he said.

"It's up to Hawkesbury Council to decide whether to prosecute and seek punitive measures in relation to breaching its Tree Preservation Order.

"All I seek in my appeal to Council is professional and accurate ecological assessment of the damage done, and full and appropriate remediation."

Dr Larkin has now engaged his own environmental consultants - local residents Richard Wells and Dr Trevor Hawkeswood - to advise him on the issue.

Dr Hawkeswood described Mr Lister's tree clearing as "something you'd expect to see in the New Guinea highlands - it's a third-world clearing operation," he said.

Mr Wells said it was imperative the felled trees were immediately scattered around

the site to prevent loss of vital top soil.

Mr Wells and Dr Hawkeswood said Mr Lister had potentially breached several other laws, including the Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997, the Rivers and Foreshores Improvement Act 1948, the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995, the Environmental Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 2000, and the Environmental Protection Assessment Act 1979.

Council voted seven to one in favour of Cr Williams motion - seconded by Councillor Paul Rasmussen - to engage an independent consultant to prepare an ecological report on the damage to the property, to be further reported to Council and Mr Lister be requested to pay for the report. Council will consider ratifying that decision at its ordinary meeting next Tuesday evening, August 14.