

# Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment

## President's Report

### AGM August 23, 2010

Today I present my 4<sup>th</sup> annual report to you as President of *Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment*. Our group was formed 5 years ago by Judith Bennett and I was one of the late comers – I joined when Friends was ten months old. In those days about 8 of us sat around Judith's dining room table every month and talked about what might be possible. The committee has served you well – please stand Judith, Ian Hehir, Mary Armstrong, Jacqui Marlow, Phil and Barry Morris, Ann Sharp, Jenny Wilson, Anthony Harris and Angus Gordon. We thank you all. As you'll see in a moment Barry, Ian and Anthony are stepping down for a bit of a break. Well earned it is too. We thank them for their contributions.

We have some new people standing for the committee, which is great – but we are still going to be short handed. Few people have the time to serve on committees these days, so I will be proposing to the incoming committee that we adopt a new scheme that will encourage members to help us out on a one off, short term, project basis to undertake specific tasks. For instance to run a membership recruitment drive for us, prepare a submission or to see whether there are some environmental grants out there that we should be applying for. I think we should call these generous people *Catchment Ambassadors*. So if you'd like to volunteer for this programme, talk to me or any of our committee people this evening.

*Friends* mission is to see the remaining bushland in the catchment of Narrabeen Lagoon permanently protected and remediation occur where necessary. As land values continue to increase, there are constant pressures to replace this bushland with urban development. If this occurs, it will have a catastrophic impact on the catchment and the lagoon itself, with ecosystems collapsing and the lagoon becoming a swamp.

When he was State Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus promised that 446 hectares of Crown Land in the catchment would be protected forever. So far only 305 hectares have been gazetted for environmental protection. Our suspicion is that the balance – 141 hectares or one third of the area – is slated for sale by the Department of Lands for housing and commercial development.

The most logical way to protect the remaining land would be to extend Garigal National Park. The difficulty here is that National Parks & Wildlife Service see the conservation values as too low and the management issues as being too problematic.

*Friends* believes the next best option would be to turn the area – including the lagoon itself - into a State Park controlled by an independent trust. We have secured the enthusiastic endorsement of the three members of State parliament whose electorates border the lagoon. Soon we will have a comprehensive document and presentation that will explore the concept in depth. This will be presented to our members and supporters here at our November forum and then utilised to secure commitments from both major parties at the State election due next March.

We held four public forums over the past 12 months exploring different issues relating to the catchment. The highlight was the February forum on the mountain biking and dredging issues which attracted over 230 people. We are actively involved with the mountain biking community and the two councils to resolve matters relating to both of these contentious issues.

*Friends* is heavily involved in the remediation of the catchment and we chair and have a representative on the Project Reference Group, set up by the two councils to ensure the objectives of the \$1.9m Urban Sustainability Grant for creek remediation are met in a timely fashion. We are looking at ways this work can continue beyond April next year, when the grant expires. We support the proposed dredging of the lagoon, subject to environmental safeguards.

*Friends* activities programme continues. Our bushwalks, tag along tours and kayak trips, all run by committee members and Councillor Conny Harris, are in enormous demand and have significantly improved community awareness of the issues. Over the next seven weeks alone we'll run seven bushwalks, eco-paddles and tag along tours. Nearly a thousand people have taken part in these since we launched the series in 2007.

We were able to assist Pittwater and Warringah Councils produce the wonderful video, "Caring for our Catchment", funded by the NSW Environmental Trust, which had its premiere in this room in February.

So far this year your committee has written submissions or lobbied decision makers on 12 issues relating to the catchment including the huge retirement resort proposed for the umpteenth time for Oxford Falls.

Our financial position remains strong – in fact we have increased our reserves by 30% since my last report, which will allow us to hire external consultants and lawyers in future, should these be required to defend the catchment. More on this from our Treasurer Jenny, in a moment.

Finally, I particularly want to acknowledge the enthusiasm and strong support of you, our members and supporters. We head into our 6<sup>th</sup> year in a very robust position, with clear objectives and strategies and an even stronger determination to achieve total environmental protection for Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment.

*Tony Carr - President*