

2013 President's Report

Friends was formed in 2005 as a result of a community summit on the status of the Lagoon and catchment, organised by Warringah Council. Our mission was - and still is - to see the remaining bushland in the catchment permanently protected and remediation occur where necessary. As you have heard tonight, we have made major progress this year in achieving that objective.

When I joined the group in 2006, our entire membership fitted comfortably around Judith Bennett's dining room table. Now our member and supporter base exceeds a thousand and is growing all the time. Many of our most valued members are here tonight and I want to thank you for your enthusiasm and for the individual contributions many of you have made to our cause. These forums have become more like family gatherings. I'm told we are now probably the largest community group on the Northern Beaches. Numbers are important because when we lobby politicians, councillors and others, the first question we get is invariably "how many people do you represent?" The number can make the difference between getting 2 or 20 minutes of their time.

It's with pleasure that I present my 7th annual report as President of *Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment*.

Our original strategy was to lobby for the extension of Garigal National Park to include Crown Lands around the lagoon, but National Parks & Wildlife Service rejected the proposal because of the additional cost of maintenance and what they described as the unsuitability of much of the land. Three years ago we switched strategy to lobby for the creation of Narrabeen State Park. As most of you know, we were successful in gaining the support of the three State politicians whose electorates border the lagoon, including Planning Minister Hazzard and Pittwater and Warringah Councils. We have also lobbied the Department of Lands and gained the support of a number of other local community groups. Had State government acted promptly on our proposal, as we urged them to after the 2011 election, we would have our park by now.

The proposal for an Aboriginal owned park is welcomed and supported by *Friends*. Our position is that we will support any legitimate proposal that will enable us to achieve our objective – that is, to see the remaining bushland in the catchment permanently protected. We continue to encourage State Government to declare Narrabeen State Park as this would protect those portions of public land not covered by the Aboriginal Land Council proposal – like the Lagoon itself.

Members of your committee have met with Kathy Ridge and Judith and I have met Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Council Chairman, Ricky Lyons. We have offered our assistance with the business case for the Park, which will need to be extremely robust, if State Government agreement and financial support is to be secured.

Our quarterly forums continue to be well supported. We thank Mary Armstrong, Jennifer Harris, Phyll Morris, Ruth Sutton, Peter Bennett, Ken Higgs and others for their help in organising these. By far the most significant forum this year was Narrabeen 2050. This was our attempt to encourage politicians and councils to stop planning just for today and to take a more far-sighted view by looking ahead to the year 2050. Committee member Angus Gordon put together a thought-provoking presentation that should be required viewing for every planner. We have prepared a video version of the presentation – thanks to the generosity of video whizz Peter Beeh – which we are providing to all decision-makers at no charge. Whether we like it or not, the Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment is going to attract an increasing number of visitors, particularly with the opening of the multi-purpose trail around the lagoon next year and the possibility of an Aboriginal Cultural Centre being located in the new park. We can't stop the trend even if we wanted to, but we can manage it to ensure impact on the environment is minimised.

The other issue that has occupied much of our time is the dredging of the lagoon, which has the support of the majority of the community. *Friends* supports the proposal, providing there is no negative impact on the environment. We agree with Warringah Council's three part plan but believe the process covers ground that has been gone over many times in the past 20 years. The result is an unnecessarily costly and drawn out exercise for ratepayers.

We are excited at the prospect of the opening of the Multi-use trail around the lagoon, scheduled for mid 2014.

I want to particularly acknowledge the work of Ann Sharp and others on our committee in preparing a very large number of submissions over the past 12 months. These involve a tremendous amount of work. I also want to acknowledge the help we've received from the general membership in their preparation.

We also produced newsletters every two or three months and our website – www.narrabeenlagoon.org.au has been upgraded and regularly maintained.

During the year we established two new sub-committees – a Non-urban Lands Sub-committee headed by Conny Harris and a Youth Sub-committee, designed to bring more young people into our fold. The latter has a way to go. Young people have crowded agendas.

Our free community bushwalks and kayak trips, run by Conny Harris and myself, are in great demand and have significantly improved community awareness of catchment issues. Thank you Conny. Over 1,400 people have taken part in these since we launched the series in 2007. We have a bushwalk and Eco-Paddle coming up this weekend. Just speak to me or Conny after this if you'd like to join us. They are great fun.

I particularly want to thank our committee and acknowledge the dedication and inspiration of our Founder, Judith Bennett, who shoulders more than her share of the load in the running of our group.

Angus Gordon is leaving our committee so that he has time for another project, but will continue to be available to us. His advice and experience are very valuable to us so we appreciate his continuing involvement. If you would like to join our committee or help us with a one off assignment please make contact. For instance you might like to run a membership recruitment drive for us, prepare a submission or to see whether there are some environmental grants out there that we could be applying for.

Our financial position remains strong, as you'll hear from Diane. Our objective is to have \$25,000 or thereabouts invested so we can hire external consultants and lawyers, should these be required to help us defend the catchment.

2013/14 will be my last year as President, if I am elected again tonight. I think 8 years is long enough for one person to occupy this position and that *Friends* will benefit from a fresh face and some new perspectives. The new committee will, I am sure, be looking for a suitable replacement so that the transition can occur smoothly.

We head into our 9th year in a very robust position, with clear objectives and strategies - and the real hope that in the immediate future, not one but two legally designated parks will bring about total environmental protection for our beloved Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment.

Tony Carr – President
August 26, 2013