

# Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment Inc

## 2014 President's Report

In preparing this report – my 8<sup>th</sup> to you as president – I reread the 5 Newsletters we've published since our last AGM. They make great reading and underline the fact that it's been a terrific year for us.

In our August issue last year we announced that the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council, the owner of the largest area of natural bushland in the catchment, had proposed that their land be leased and managed as Gai-mariagal National Park under Part 4A of the National Parks and Wildlife Act of NSW. *Friends* originally wanted the Crown Land in the catchment to become part of Garigal National Park but because this was not possible at the time, we had been lobbying for it to be gazetted as Narrabeen State Park. The Gai-mariagal proposal is appealing because it involves a huge thousand hectares that would be managed as one large national park. This would deliver the permanent protection of the remaining bushland in the catchment, that is our principle objective and the reason we were established in 2005.

Since August of last year, your committee has been very focussed on this proposal and has lobbied hard at State and local government level to move it forward. We have contributed a lengthy section to the proposal document itself and have formed an alliance of community groups, representing over 6,000 concerned local residents keen to see Gai-mariagal become reality. So now it's not just *Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment* that wants this outcome, but 10 community groups. We are working productively with Nathan Moran, the new CEO of the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council.

If this proposal doesn't get off the ground, we have a commitment from Rob Stokes, the State's new Environment Minister and our local MP, to expand the newly established State park to encompass the available Crown lands. While this places us in a very strong position, we know that it will take significant ongoing pressure from us to deliver the result we want – i.e. Gai-mariagal National Park. While your committee will drive this, our members will need to play a pivotal role by writing in support of our actions to local councils, the Department of Lands and State and Federal politicians. If you are not sure what to say in your letters or who to send them to, please ask us.

In our October newsletter, we reported on the signing of a \$3.6m construction contract and an agreement with the Sydney Academy of Sport that would allow the construction of bridges over South and Middle Creeks to complete the multi-purpose trail around the lagoon. For bushwalkers, cyclists and lovers of the bush, the trail will bring much joy. It will also bring visitors in large numbers and we remain concerned that facilities will have to be provided by Warringah and

Pittwater Councils to cater for the increase in numbers. The trail is scheduled to open at the end of the year.

We had good news to report in our December newsletter. Our member and long time advocate for environmental protection of the catchment, Jim Somerville had successfully lobbied Roads and Maritime Services to provide a fence separating traffic from pedestrians on Narrabeen Bridge – where Pittwater Road crosses the lagoon. Jim had been told this solution would require the lifting of all concrete blocks and be too expensive. He worked with Michael Bucknell who came up with a cheaper solution and with more pressure from Jim, the fences were quickly in position. Jim was a lifelong environmentalist and campaigned up until his sad passing just two months ago at the age of 98.

On February 3 we staged our biggest forum for the year in a room much larger than the room we are in tonight, at the Academy of Sport. The subject was dredging and Warringah Council presented three plans for dredging the lagoon and asked residents to vote for their preferred option. It was a flawed process. The three solutions involved technical matters way beyond the knowledge or expertise of the person in the street. The process clearly created confusion at council level too because the announcement of the poll was a long time coming. Council's solution is no dredging - raise the level of the water instead! The process involved the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of ratepayer's dollars.

We published a special edition of our newsletter on April 1, with photographs taken that day of the announcement of the declaration of Narrabeen State Park by Deputy Premier Andrew Stoner. It was a scoop! The announcement was in the Manly Daily 12 hours later! The park encompasses 470 hectares and includes the lagoon itself. We had lobbied for the park for three years and this was a major achievement for us. I was pleased in the accompanying publicity to be able to pay tribute to our 1,246 members and supporters for their encouragement and enthusiasm during the campaign. I also thanked Rob Stokes who had championed the park at state government level.

So, there you have the highlights for the year. Of course much more goes on behind the scenes in our organisation. In our July newsletter you would have noted that many formal letters and submissions have been prepared on issues ranging from the proposed changes to the NSW Planning Laws through to the need for Aboriginal signage around the lagoon and many issues relating to land usage and bushland protection. Our activities programme continues to do much to raise awareness of catchment issues. There is nothing more convincing than to be on a bushwalk or Eco-Paddle to appreciate the value of what we have here. The activities programme has resulted in many more members joining us and support for our campaigns continues to grow. Just on 2,000 people have participated since we started these in 2007. On your seat tonight we have placed a list of upcoming walks and paddles. They are free so do join us and celebrate this gift of nature we are so privileged to experience. *Friends* has a

comprehensive website which is constantly expanding. We encourage its use by school and university students studying the catchment as well as the member and supporter base.

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.

Would committee members please stand and be acknowledged. (Applause)  
Please remember that this is a voluntary group. None of these fine people get paid for the many, many hours they devote to our cause. You will see their names on the screen shortly as I am pleased that all have agreed to stand for re-election. As our workload has increased I have been particularly keen to strengthen our committee and I am pleased to report that in recent months we have added a number of talented and experienced heavy-hitters to our group.

Our financial position remains strong. 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. Our current assets balance is just over \$27,000, which is good.

We have recorded a slight drop in paid membership to 345. Our supporter base continues to grow at over 1,000. We are about to undertake a membership drive so if you are not a financial member, I suggest you could hand over \$20 tonight and get this drive off to a good start!

This is the last time I'll address you as your president. As I indicated at the AGM last year, I think eight years is long enough to have to put up with one person in this role – especially if this one person is me - and *Friends* will benefit from a fresh face and some new perspectives. I have with pleasure nominated Judith Bennett for the position and she has agreed to stand. I urge you to support Judith as our new president.

I have agreed to stand for the committee and can assure you remain committed to total environmental protection for our beloved Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment.

Thank you for your support.

*Tony Carr*  
*August 25, 2014*