



President's Annual Report – 2017

Christopher L. Watson. AGM – 3rd August 2017

Special Highlights of 2016-17

Firstly, an *Aboriginal Cultural Assessment Report* has made us aware of some eight significant sights in the area of the Ginninderra and Murrumbidgee Gorges; for example, the upper Ginninderra Gorge is an important ceremonial area. Secondly, bushfire research undertaken by Professor Jason Sharples of the University of New South Wales has revealed that housing close to the Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra Gorges will be very vulnerable to embers coming from north-westerly forest fires.

Aboriginal Heritage Significance

The Aboriginal Report released in May 2017, is a very thorough assessment researched by *Waters Consultancy* of Balmain, NSW (two versions: confidential 140pg, public 134pg). We could well need to form a sub-committee to work through the range of recommendations that will come under the auspices of both the Yass Valley Council and the New South Wales Government. Already it has the effect of engendering new housing boundary setbacks by the developer. Sadly, the public of the ACT region is still largely unaware of the significance this area has to the Aboriginal Culture.

Bushfire Impacts

The media coverage in June 2017, following Jason Sharples' research, has been very fruitful. Our committee, in association with help from the Ginninderra Catchment Group members are to be congratulated; some very large personal donations, as well as 'crowd funding' have underpinned this effort. Hopefully it will also put a halt to current development proposals adjacent to both the Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra Gorges.

Threatened Species and Biodiversity Issues

These matters have been well documented by reports instigated by the developer; also, the follow-up efforts by Dr David Wong under the auspices of the Ginninderra Catchment Group. The Federal *Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation* legislation, too, is pertinent. Restoration and regeneration of species, alongside both gorges, are urgently needed, especially alongside the Upper Ginninderra Falls and this must also include the adjacent Quarry, which needs to cease and be restored. On our behalf, the Environmental Defenders Offices (EDO) both in the ACT and NSW are investigating the Quarry issue (also many thanks to the EDO for their current legal efforts).

Park 'Site-lines' and Buffer Zones Essential

Boundaries of National Parks must always have wide surrounding buffer areas which exclude any housing development both on the ground and visually.

Visitors to the Upper Ginninderra Falls for example, certainly do not want to be confronted with any housing let alone a quarry! The proposed development area is almost on a plateau, so any distant high rise cannot be allowed. We need to seriously take on the thoughts of our patron, Dr Bryan Pratt, who repeatedly emphasises the passive recreation and tourist potential of a National Park so close to ACT's northern boundary. Think too of regional population growth, which could well reach a million by the centuries end.

Beware: The Rezoning Process!

Rural-to-Urban rezoning is always a financial bonanza for the developer and local land owners. In the coming year Yass Valley Council and the NSW Government will be deciding on this area's rezoning. Our Association, together with the Ginninderra Catchment Group representatives, have been in frequent contact with the Yass Councillors stressing that any rezoning would be counterproductive to our vision for a Park centred on Ginninderra Falls. It will encompass both sides of Ginninderra Gorge and also upstream and downstream of the Murrumbidgee Gorge at the confluence.

Citizen and Political Involvement Lacking

It is a tragedy that decisions are being made by Yass Council, ACT, NSW and Federal Governments, when so few have been to the Falls itself, for example, an effort made by the new Yass Valley Council to visit the Gorge in May was aborted at the last minute. We must keep pushing! Moreover, the ACT Assembly has still not conducted a public inquiry of this whole cross border development. Unfortunately, housing development inquiries were once mandatory, we should now return to the mandatory inquiries.

Our Committee Team

Work, deputations and submissions a-plenty, with all their myriad aspects keeping us busy; not only from the various impacts of the 'Ginninderry Development', but also the need to keep our focus on a National Park vision. Moreover, we need now to catalyse a professional television documentary. We have much in common of course with the Ginninderra Catchment Group and we have wonderful support from its members. Also, we are interacting well with the Frank Fenner Foundation. Thanks to our stirring committee, and sorry to learn that our inaugural member, Graeme Barrow, an eminent author and naturalist, died in May 2017.