

# NPA ACT 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY MEMBERS' FORUM

6 APRIL 2019

## SUMMARY

### Theme and Objectives

#### **Theme:**

*Protecting our national parks for future generations*

#### **Objectives:**

- To consider both ongoing challenges and new/emerging challenges to NPA's work to protect Namadgi and other national parks
- To explore future strategic directions to achieve the most positive outcomes of our work
- To share ideas and experiences with friends and colleagues from inside and outside of NPA ACT

### Background

The NPA ACT is a community-based conservation organisation which supports the protection of our natural environment through an active outings and work party program; participation in Parkcare activities; an extensive publication program; public meetings and conferences and engagement with government policies and programs. Our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary will take place on 1 March 2020 and the lead up to this key milestone offers an opportunity for the organisation to reflect on its past achievements and explore its future directions.

Much has happened in the world since the NPA ACT was first created in 1960. Many national parks, including Namadgi, currently face many daunting challenges to their environmental and cultural values – in some cases, even to their very existence. Some of these challenges include poor land and water resource management, invasive animals/plants and climate change, among others.

The forum aimed to identify where and how NPA ACT should focus its energies in the years ahead to support the protection of our national parks, including Namadgi, and the uniquely Australian environmental and cultural heritage contained within them. A total of 22 NPA members participated in this half day event, together with 11 invited guests from other organisations with some shared interests (refer to annex for details). Cynthia Burton, NPA ACT Vice President, facilitated the forum.

### Acknowledgement of Country/Welcome

Esther Gallant, President of NPA ACT, acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land on which the forum was held and welcomed the participants. She informed them of the recent passing of a member, David Large.

### Presentation: Namadgi and Other Australian National Parks: Needs, Opportunities and Threats

Brett McNamara, Manager of Namadgi National Park spoke about the changed context in which the caretakers of national parks work today. In years past, the roles of parks' staff were largely focused on looking after the flora and fauna. This focus has gradually changed to one of managing people, including: politicians, the visiting public, and various other interest groups/stakeholders.

Brett described the approach currently being taken in Namadgi as ‘the four pillars of people management.’ The pillars include:

1. Retaining a focus on natural values, ie the flora and fauna of the park;
2. Promoting both indigenous and European cultural heritage, eg Aboriginal rock art sites and sites associated with the 50th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing;
3. Promoting engagement with nature as a means of creating healthier individuals, societies and communities – based on scientific evidence of these benefits; and
4. Building community social license to act.

Brett considered the fourth pillar to be particularly important to the future of national parks in Australia. He explained: compared to 30 years ago, the average person does not get as much exposure to key environmental concepts and relationships, such as the linkages between feral horses, damage to sphagnum moss, and water supply. Environment issues are not as visible in the media as in the past, and there is less understanding in the wider community of the relevance of national parks to their lives. Individuals are engaging with nature in new and different ways than previously, such as the rise in popularity of physical endurance events, and a more demographically diverse population is exploring nature.

Brett felt that there is a need for parks agencies and organisations such as NPA ACT to build a narrative with the community about why nature is important, a narrative that is clear and simple to understand; he gave the example of the (widely well received) story that he wrote for media use on ‘the life of a raindrop.’ He expressed the view that activities such as taking politicians and the media on field visit play a valuable role in personalising and humanising the issues with this audience. He thought that there is further scope for NPA ACT to think creatively and work proactively with new and different groups of people, such as climate change groups, as well as to work towards strengthening the diversity of the organisation to reflect the wider community that now engages with the environment.

### **Brainstorming Session: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)**

The participants brainstormed in five small groups to identify the SWOT for NPA ACT in achieving its goal of protecting national parks for future generations. The results were:<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Strengths***

- Non-government and apolitical so we can lobby without fear
- Our involvement with groups like the ACT government coordinated ‘[Nature Play](#)’
- ‘Boots on the ground,’ ie eyes and ears for the parks
- Publication experience and expertise
- Extensive accumulated knowledge and experience (3), including lobbying and activist skills
- A strong narrative on national parks and environmental concerns (2)
- Membership: donations, active, educated, organised - eg success of Reclaim Kosci in raising awareness of feral horse impacts on Kosciuszko National Park
- Good reputation and networks with other respected organisations in ACT and nationally, such as the NPA network around Australia (4)
- Good relationships with ACT politicians/political clout
- Community connection
- Some good media relationships
- Access to interesting projects

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note: numbers in brackets refer to number of small groups that made the same/similar observation

## ***Weaknesses***

- 'Apolitical' position of other groups puts relationships in strained position
- Lack of engagement with diverse groups, ie youth, different cultures, different interests (beyond bushwalking); age/cultural diversity issues mentioned by 4 of 5 groups
- Lack of diversity in membership – by age (4), culture (3), other forms of demographic spread (2)
- Narrow expertise [some felt NPA ACT is too scientific/technical focused]
- 'Brand' and name may come across as being very conservative (2)
- Limited activation of membership expertise
- Capacity to ask membership what they can do
- Communication skills in modern world (3)
- Perception of being too 'clique-y' (2)
- Aging membership creates further challenges for engagement (2)
- No paid staff and insufficient volunteers (3) – may need to 'retreat' when issues are not relevant [or choose among competing priorities more]
- Inactive members
- Lack of a public spokesperson [ambassador/champion]

## ***Opportunities***

- **Promoting national parks as climate change buffer** (seen as very important by the collective group)
- Need to reinforce our passion and strengths and better communicate/share this with others
- Promote the concept of being 'climate ready' and ecological integrity eg Canada model and translate this into upgrade of ACT Parks legislation to strengthen focus on identifying and responding to changing/evolving conditions in the parks (support this work) – refer to aims and actions section for further details
- Promote national parks as an aid to mental health
- Jump on 'Nature Play' bandwagon
- Possible input into strengthening of Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act
- Focus on the 4 pillars as outlined by Brett
- Increase our relevance through effective communication and education (4)
- Commercialisation of parks (reaching out to new interest groups), eg engage the newly emerging outdoor adventure groups, eg 'She went wild' and 'We're Outdoors'
- Tap into diversity of park user groups, other agencies, multicultural groups
- Increase familiarity of public with technical apps which explain flora/fauna and park walks
- Develop collaborations/associations with likeminded groups and people
- Communications: help community to link science with climate change/promote science
- Revive prior disability initiative with ACT Parks
- Increase effectiveness of online presence
- Engagement: other groups, new activities, new demographics, new technology, education programs
- More engagement with the wider community
- NPA activities in urban parks
- Develop: cross-generational experience and communications links between organisations
- Open the narrative to include others than elite experts – academics and scientists

## **Threats**

### *Social/Political/Economic:*

- Commercialisation of national parks, ie potential damage and strains on capacity of environment to cope (3)
- Increasing range of competing leisure options
- Difficult lobby/interest groups (feral people) + increased sophistication of opposition (3)
- Parks being 'over' or 'under' loved
- Parks need to be adequately funded
- 'Responsible' recreation message needs to get out there, eg toileting in the bush
- NPA ACT appears 'clique-y', insular and conservative to some (2)
- No culture of custodianship
- Public perception of actions (ie feral animal culling)
- NPA membership is ageing - needs 'succession' planning
- Younger people don't always want to be members of groups/organisations; they tend to have an issue focus which restricts long-term engagement
  - Need targeted campaigns – can't be too general or broad if we want to attract younger members
- Negative experiences around some youth/outreach programs
- Time pressure on younger people/career pressure
- Possible perception of Irrelevance of organisation in future

### *Physical:*

- Climate change
- Increasing numbers and poor management of feral animals (2)
- Urban encroachment into nature/park space
- Population pressure

## **Presentation: Reaching Out to Current and Future Generations: The Experience of Intrepid Landcare**

Megan Rowlett, assisted by her co-founder Naomi Edwards, outlined the origin and approach of Intrepid Landcare (IL). When Megan originally joined a landcare group some years ago, she had a positive experience but also noticed that most people involved in landcare were older. She wanted to find a way to link older people with younger people and share the multiple benefits of doing this volunteer work – in terms of health, connection with nature, making a contribution to the environment, etc.

IL was started around a decade ago and became a national organisation in 2015. IL applies the organisation's understanding of how young people connect and care for the environment with the experience of Landcare groups and communities. IL did a multi-state survey of why young people engaged in Landcare and found that the main barriers to volunteering were: lack of time; not aware of opportunities; did not feel comfortable turning up to projects and not knowing anyone; other work/life commitments; and they did not feel invited (mainly a reflection of the approach of organisations to extending the 'invitation'). The top three reasons they stayed involved in volunteer landcare work included: they felt like they were making a difference to the local environment; they liked being in the 'great outdoors;' and they had fun.

In the early days of IL's work, Megan discovered that she had to put considerable effort into breaking down negative attitudes and perceptions of older people about younger people (eg unreliable, more

interested in video games, etc). She further discovered that many young people: lacked confidence in doing landcare work until they discovered others with shared values; did not have experience of some basic bush skills which made them hesitate to get involved in outdoor environmental activities; wanted and needed opportunities to lead activities (projects); and to explore and connect with others and with nature. They wanted to feel valued and heard.

IL has run many outdoor weekends for young people aged 10-24. Young people are empowered with basic training to take on leadership roles and supported by older people to do this. Many have gone on to start their own groups, and there are now 14-15 IL networks around Australia. These are designed as safe and non-judgemental experiences. IL also run workshops and related activities to help organisations and communities to build connections and relationships with younger people. There is a charge for the latter activities, which is used to subsidise youth (outdoors-oriented) leadership training.

Megan shared IL's top tips for engaging young people successfully. These focused on: identifying and mapping out the demographic group(s), with whom we want to engage; working out the networks, clubs and places they 'hang out, ' along with building up an understanding of their needs, wants and fears; challenging our assumptions about youth; being clear about what motivates us to do the work we do and being able to 'share our story' in an engaging manner (eg face-to-face, online, media); taking a personal approach to the invitation to join; and co-designing projects (activities) with these younger people.

Further details can be found in IL's workbook on [Tips and Ideas to Support Young People to Create Change](#). Hard copies are available from Esther Gallant.

### **Brainstorming Session: Shaping Some Possible Key Aims and Actions for the Future**

The five small groups of participants were tasked with identifying three possible future keys aims for NPA ACT towards achieving its goal of protecting national parks for future generations and some activities to implement these aims.

#### ***Aim: Increase membership base/broaden age range and cultural background of membership/engage with a wider range of diverse communities (4)***

- Survey current members for connections with other groups/organisations
- Investigate and decide on the demographic with whom we would like to engage; undertake an audit or poll
  - Possibilities could include university students, new graduates, primary/secondary students, new migrants and people from other countries, embassy staff, refugee centres
- Build relationships with other groups
- Investigate ways to make NPA ACT more welcoming/appealing to new members (eg personal approach, 'buddy' or pair up a new and old member, perhaps a change of monthly meeting venue, etc)
- Make better use of social media and traditional media (eg sharing 'good news' stories like the Rosenberg's Monitor research project)

#### ***Aim: Review NPA ACT's scope and mission (2)***

Ask ourselves:

- What is the purpose of NPA?

- Are we trying to do too much?
- Is the core business getting lost in the plethora of activities?
- What are the barriers to increasing and broadening our membership base?
  - Think about your culture eg some people remain in positions of power for years, these can appear as barriers and 'fiefdoms' to new members. It can be intimidating. People not wanting to give up knowledge. Position power – albeit well intentioned (not meant to be judgmental, just an impression)

***Aim: Education & awareness raising re nature/develop a new communication & outreach strategy (5)***

- Design and engage in well targeted, clear communication strategies: consider negative/positive tone; 'nudge' theory; explain impact and the "WHY" (ie relevance of what we are doing)
- Educational campaigns to distil science down to reach the broader population – be a communicator of science (could also be an aim)
- Hold communication competitions: video, photography (formal and informal), blogs – other literature
- Short, direct and snappy campaigns, eg "water don't waste a drop"; possibly one big new campaign (water? custodianship?)
- Use techniques such as story telling
- Identify role models to help communicate key messages (elders?)
- Engage (experienced? trained?) communicators and networks to support this work

***Aim: Make responsible use of national parks fun and engaging***

- Define or clarify NPA ACT views on what 'responsible recreation' is
  - Including our views on engagement with trends/initiatives to commercialise the national park experience, such as 'glamping' and 'iconic walks'
- Consider ways to invite new communities to experience walking, camping, bushwalking and interacting with nature
  - Skills to do it safely
  - Possible links with: Nature Play, grandparents, ANU, Intrepid Landcare, joint programs with CBC (eg talks/shared activities)

***Aim: Integrate and promote a culture of climate readiness across planning, governance and actions in ACT protected areas***

- Promote the adoption of an 'ecological integrity in a changing climate' approach by ACT decision-makers in our national parks, possibly along the lines of the [model used by Parks Canada](#). This allows an objective assessment of the current and changing conditions within the parks by monitoring their major components such as forests and wetlands
  - Ie Parks Canada implements a monitoring and reporting framework which tracks key species, their conditions, and the state of ecosystem processes in all of Canada's national parks. For each park, decisions have been made about what will be monitored and how it will be monitored. This information is then reported on against clear objectives and the trend in condition assessed, which influences the prioritization of funds allocated to protected areas (ie there is accountability to government and the public for decisions made).
- Strengthen links with ACT Parks and other key stakeholder groups to do this

***Aim: Add value to NPA-sponsored research***

- Use research projects for public relations
- Use research outcomes to encourage bequests
- Continue to support research that supports our broader goal

**Conclusion: Where to Next?**

Cynthia advised the participants that the information and ideas generated from the forum would be collated and shared with NPA ACT's membership. The results would be used to inform future decision-making at the sub-committee, committee and organizational levels.

Cynthia also thanked Annette Smith and Deidre Shaw for their contributions to morning tea and event organisations, as well as the invited guests for sharing their time and thoughts with NPA ACT.

## ANNEX: FORUM PARTICIPANTS

### NPA ACT (22)

Dierk von Behrens  
Fiona Brand  
Cynthia Burton (C)  
Martin Chalk  
Hannah Conway (C)  
Esther Gallant (P)  
Rod Griffiths (C)  
Beverley Hammond  
Clive Hurlstone  
Ed Highley  
Judy Kelly  
Sonja Lenz (C)  
Quentin Moran  
Terrylea Reynolds  
Graham Scully  
Allan Sharp  
Deidre Shaw  
Annette Smith  
Mike Smith  
Di Thomson  
Gary Thompson  
Tim Walsh

### External Guests (11)

Nick Blood, Environmental Officer, Australian National University (ANU) Environmental Collective  
Warwick Cathro, CEO, Change.350  
Naomi Edwards, Co-founder, Intrepid Landcare  
Linda Groom, Walks Secretary, Canberra Bushwalking Club (and NPA member)  
Brett McNamara, Manager, Namadgi National Park  
Julie Pettit, Secretary, Brindabella Bushwalkers Club  
Megan Rowlatt, Co-founder, Intrepid Landcare  
Alison and Richard Swain, Reclaim Kosci  
Sumithri Venketasubramanian, ANU Environmental Collective  
Graeme Worboys, Associate Professor (Protected Area Management Specialist), ANU