

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF THE ACT INC.

GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, 19 June 2021

Uniting Church Hall, Scrivener Street, O'Connor

1. Welcome and apologies

President Esther Gallant welcomed about 40 members and guests to the meeting and paid respects to the traditional custodians of the land and their elders past and present.

Apologies were received from Stefan de Montis, Cynthia Burton, Debbie Worner, Chris Emery & Sabine Friedrich, Jan & Philip Gatenby, Don Fletcher, Ross & Sue Kingsland, Helen Stephens, Paul Regan, Michelle Weston, Judy & Dave Kelly, Debbie Cameron, Bruce & Maria Boreham.

2. Current activities

Esther reported on a positive development in the Reclaim Kosci campaign: Federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley has expressed dismay over the damage done by feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park after being taken on a helicopter information flight over severely damaged areas and declared that something has to be done to reduce horse numbers. We await the action...

Isobel Crawford reported on an NPA grant application which she and John Brickhill had submitted to the Landcare-led Bushfire Recovery Fund. The grant would be used by NPA to fund a course on weed-recognition skills for Landcare and Bushcare volunteers as well as rural landholders. An updated weed-recognition guide would be prepared and used for a one-day indoor session and 3 all-day outdoor practical bushland sessions on weed recognition and removal.

3. Presentation

Esther welcomed ACT ministers Rattenbury and Vassarotti who had been asked to comment on government plans for protecting the future of the ACT's natural environment and what opportunities and challenges the ACT faces in achieving the goals.

The ministers had been informed that some of NPA members' concerns are about planning for:

- connectivity and wildlife corridors between ACT nature parks and reserves and with the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee River Corridors;
- protection of the nature parks and reserves as well as Namadgi from destructive 'high value tourism' such as helicopter and 4WD tours and mountain biking;
- adequate budgets to control the post-fire weed and deer invasions;
- significantly increasing the urban tree canopy and reducing mature tree removal for development.

Shane Rattenbury, Minister for Climate Change and Water, gave a short rundown of how climate change is affecting Canberra with temperatures rising and increasingly more days/year over 40 degrees C. One interesting fact was that during Covid there were 40% less CO2 emissions which was a positive effect of the pandemic.

In respect to his water portfolio the minister acknowledged the big impact the Orroral bushfire had on Canberra's water, but he recognised how the early work of the Parks and Conservation Service in respect to water runoff had paid off. He regrets that there is not one dedicated 'Office for Water' in the ACT, instead several government agencies have responsibilities for different aspects of water management.

Rebecca Vassarotti is the very new minister responsible for ACT land management, threatened species and their habitats, amongst others. In her introduction she thanked the NPA for welcoming her to her portfolio (a congratulatory letter had been sent by President Esther Gallant). She agrees her biggest challenge is to get the Canberra community to care about the national park and nature reserves in the capital, and in general care for the environment which includes caring for people's physical and mental well-being as well.

She realises that improving connectivity between the ACT's natural areas is an important element in protecting threatened and endangered species. Analytical modelling is being employed to ascertain

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what resources are needed and when for the endangered Glossy Black-Cockatoo and the Gang-gang Cockatoo in an effort to save them from extinction in the ACT.

Another important aspect of her responsibilities is to oversee the management of pest species in the ACT, and she mentioned having discussions with the NSW Minister for the Environment on feral horses, especially in the border region, and that she is hopeful that NSW will improve their oversight. Rebecca talked about the recent (and ongoing) successful deer and pig program where thermal imaging was used to find the normally elusive animals. High on her list of priorities is finding more professional resources and training environmental volunteers.

In the following discussion both speakers responded to questions from the floor including concerns about environmental standards with the delegation of decisions from the Federal Government to individual States ('watering down' of the EPBC Act) proposed by Sussan Ley, the Federal Environment Minister.

NPA members are especially concerned that the ACT environment is administered by three areas of ACT Government and that the need for more rangers in the Parks Service and recurrent funding have not been adequately addressed, although the introduction of six First Nations rangers is welcomed.

Overall, members agree that environmental education must begin with school programs that teach kids to understand natural processes, and thereby learn to love, and care for, nature.

Esther thanked both speakers and closed the official meeting at 20:50. Discussions in small groups with the speakers continued for quite a while afterwards.

Next general meeting: Thursday, 15 July 2021 at 19:30

Chair: Date: