**FRIENDS OF THE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK INCORPORATED**

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING**

**Held on Thursday 24Th February 2022 at 4.00pm via Zoom**

**Meeting opened:** at 4.00 pm

**Chairperson – Basil Ellis Minutes – Dave Robson, Diane Townley**

**Committee Members present**

Basil Ellis, Ian Hill, Ralph Cartwright, Peter Donley, Dave Robson, Diane Townley, Neville Bethe, Dave Croft (NPWS - Liaison)

**Apologies**

Mark DaSilva

**Members and other attendees**

Steve Anyon-Smith, Gilad Bino (UNSW), Kylie Madden (NPWS), Joe Stammers (NPWS), Steve Johnson, Geoff Francis, Tony Larkin, Rhonda Nelson, Joanne Neyle, Lyndall Gregory, Suzanne Curtis, Nerida Miller, Lia TreBon, Olivia Kemp, Michael Swire, Arnold Chan, Anne Turnbull, Clifford Hobden, Enhua Lee, Martin Bell, Alanna Street, John McLean, Louise Campbell, Michelle Wallis, Linda Seymour, Finlay McLaren, Michael Cook, Venessa Adillon, Natasha Dunn, Susan Broadfield, Patsy Nagle (NPWS), plus other unidentified attendees (Hales, Zoom User, Naglep)

**Acknowledgement of Country**

Basil gave the Acknowledgement of Country.

**Treasurer’s Report**

* $7800 in bank and Paypal accounts.
* 46 financial members.

**Correspondence**

* Approach by SMH journalist Caitlin Fitzsimmons - social affairs reporter with the SMH requesting a conversation on the subject that shack residents have recently been told that their leases will end in five years time.
* Approach from the campaign office of Hughes candidate Georgia Steele to discuss challenges currently facing the park. FoR have not taken up this offer since there are other candidates who would also favour conservation and we do not want to show preference. Suggestion that members look at the candidate’s environmental concerns when looking at the candidate’s policies.

**Park Report - David Croft, Acting Team Leader, Rangers, RNP**

* Rain events- The recent wet weather has had a significant effect on park operations.
  + There has been below average visitation this Summer.
  + The weir has been flooded on several occasions, as has the boat shed affecting its operations.
  + Parts of the Coast Track have been closed due to flooding and there was a rockfall near Garie.
* Wattamolla has had major works to the lower car park, new shelters and barbecues completed. Although visitation was not as high as the usual summer numbers due to the weather, it coped well with the few extremely busy days which were experienced over the holiday period. Some car parking spots have been lost as a result of this work but the aim has been to facilitate access by bus.
* Bonnie Vale is open again after a major upgrade and the opening has been staged as there are still some teething problems which are being worked through. It should be completed in the next few months.
* Burning Palms is having steps constructed and track rerouting.
* Volunteer work has begun again with the Friends of Royal website being used for volunteer registration.
* Another grant application to LLS has been submitted to continue the work started at Jibbon Headland last year. There are three Threatened Environmental Communities (TECs) in the area.
* Dave Croft is working on environmental assessments for track trimming on a number of fire trails. The aim is to identify key sites to avoid damage to environmental and cultural assets.
* Warumbul Road is being trimmed to allow better vehicle access, especially for larger vehicles such as buses which go to the church camp sites. Trimming around significant trees and endangered species is being done by hand. Also new circular saws will be used to leave a cleaner cut and less damage, however the sites may still look quite bare after trimming.
* The successful deer culling program will continue into 2022. Aerial programs were particularly effective with 235 deer culled last year.
* There is more work planned for Lady Carrington and the planning will take into account feedback from the previous work.

**Presentation**

* Steve Anyon-Smith gave a presentation on the koalas in Heathcote NP survey that he and Tom Kristensen have been conducting since July 2021.



* Key finding is that there is a significant healthy population of koalas living across a large area of Heathcote NP. Sixty three unique koalas had been identified but estimates were 100+ were present in Heathcote NP. Many had also been found north of Heathcote Rd.
* Steve believes that the low numbers of recorded sightings compared to the numbers he has found is because you just will not see them unless you are especially looking for them.
* Post presentation discussion:
  + Speculation that there are 2 to 5 koalas in Royal National Park
  + NSW Koala program has significant funding to support action on koalas.
  + Chlamydia is present in koalas south of Appin Rd.
  + A vaccination trial is planned for Southern Highlands/ Campbelltown interface.
  + A rapid Chlamydia testing kit has been acquired for the Campbelltown area.

**General Business**

* Bushcare has restarted with more hands-on direction from NPWS:
  + Friends of Royal website has been used for volunteer registration for activities in Feb/March. In the next few months it is intended that the NPWS VIP website will take over this function once it has been customised for the Royal area.
  + Patsy has given two training sessions in February, two more are scheduled for March.
  + Royal Bushies are back running on Thursday and Saturday mornings.
  + FoR have run 3 bushcare activities in Jan/Feb:
    - Two at Red Jacks Point targeting Cassia, Prickly Pear, Green Cestrum, Scotch Thistle and Canary Island Date Palm.
    - One at Middle Rill targeting Pampas Grass, Cotton Bush and Scotch Thistle.
* Scheduled future Friends of Royal activities:
  + Friday 11th March – Red Jacks Pt bushcare
  + Monday 4th April - Red Jacks Pt or Middle Rill bushcare
  + Saturday 30th April – Wattamolla – Litter Collection.
* Scheduled Patsy led Royal Bushies activities:
  + Continuing Thursday and Saturday morning bushcare activities
  + Council nursery session on 17th March
  + Wattamolla seedling planting 10th and 24th March afternoons
  + Training on 10th and 12th March
  + Clean Up Australia day – Sunday 13th March – Burns Rd Heathcote NP.
* Friends of Royal responded to the draft NPWS Cycling Policy document with a response highlighting our concerns with:
  + the lack of enforcement of mountain biking and illegal track creation
  + sustainability of tracks needing to be defined, monitored and where unsustainable to be closed.

Peter Donley requested that his objection to this response be recorded (noted here).

* There was discussion on the merits of surveying FoR membership for their thoughts on mountain biking with some committee members for this and some against. It was noted that as part of the FoR Plan of Management response we had contacted all members for their input and received no responses. The chairperson was not in favour of such a survey and it was not taken forward.
* In responding to the Plan of Management in 2021 the committee had been split on the issue of mountain biking. Diane noted that although FoR had responded to the mountain biking policy and submissions were now closed, other divisive issues may arise in the future. She proposed that a method should be established to manage such disagreements. This will be discussed at the next committee meeting.
* Platypus Rewilding - Gilad Bino (UNSW):
  + Bug Surveys: There was reasonable diversity of species found, it was late in the season and the dragonflies were airborne.
  + They are planning a sonar study to get an understanding of the depth and the refuges in time of drought.
  + With the knowledge that there are too many foxes around, Gilad will be encouraging NPWS to start fox baiting prior to platypus release.
  + Camera traps had been set but no results had yet been studied.

**Meeting closed:** at 6.06 p.m.

**Next Committee Meeting**

* Thursday 24 March, 2022 at 4pm via Zoom

**Next General Meeting**

* Thursday 28 April 2022 at 4pm via Zoom