

President's Annual Report – 2016

Christopher L. Watson. AGM – 6th September, 2016

Need to revitalise our National Park vision

Our Association was formed five years ago with the aim of establishing Park centered on Ginninderra Gorge and its two falls; encompassing both sides of both Ginninderra and the adjacent Murrumbidgee Gorges.

This whole area is entirely across the ACT border on NSW land; it is in private ownership and, in the past, has only been visited by only a small number of, mainly, older Canberran's. It is therefore extremely difficult for citizens at large, let alone the voters of Yass Valley Council, to become passionate about preserving this area for generations to come. It is sadly a matter of 'out of sight, out of mind'.

A park of such grandeur and recreational value is a must for Canberra's growing population (now approx. 400,000 and forecast to be 600,000 by 2050). Just imagine the school bus trips, too, and tourists visiting this site just a few km's from West Belconnen!

Involvement of politicians urgently required

It is necessary for ACT politicians, together with Yass Valley Councilors, to take the lead in establishing this Park; relevant NSW and Federal Ministers also need to be involved. This is now an urgent agenda item since the Yass Valley Council, itself, in the coming months, will be voting on urban development proposals which come extremely close to Ginninderra Gorge, its Falls, and Creek as well as the Murrumbidgee Gorge.

Of course private landowners and developers share financial gains when land is rezoned from 'rural to urban'. Such a vote must be vetoed for land bordering the Gorge.

We also must have comprehensive ACT Assembly inquiry following the coming October 2016 election. Such an inquiry should be mandatory, but the ACT Government in 2015 ignored our lobbying.

Urban development proposals still coming too close to Gorges and Falls

In the last two years we have spent a disproportionate amount of our energy in consultation and discussion with the cross-border 'West Belconnen urban development' being planned and managed by 'Riverview Projects ACT Pty Ltd' on behalf of the ACT's Land Development Agency.

Issues of biodiversity, its restoration, and threatened species as well as esthetics, site lines, buffer zones, and fire exposure continue to be debated; moreover there is still an active quarry operation which is creating a terrible scarring of the landscape close to the upper falls. Our initial aim was to achieve corridors of at least 300m alongside both Gorges and Ginninderra Creek. If all the above factors are taken into account, the width will have to be much more!

Indigenous issues overlooked

We are belatedly working closely with Aboriginal representatives on the very significant 'heritage' aspects of this whole area; in particular, Ginninderra Gorge and Creek just upstream from the major upper falls which were very important ceremonial grounds. Fortunately we now have the insights of the ANU's National Centre for Indigenous Studies on their rights and interests in urban planning. Over to politicians and planners in all relevant jurisdictions, especially NSW, but also ACT and Federal.

Our committee team

A busy year indeed, involving not only monthly committee meetings, but also deputations, submissions as well as regular meetings with a Ginninderra Falls Working Group, formed in the past year; this group involves the developer Riverview Projects as well as the Ginninderra Catchment Group, the ACT Region Conservation Council and the Environmental Defenders Office ACT.

We have also recently fielded a team to visit potential Yass Valley Councilors prior to their 10th September 2016 election.

My sincere thanks to the Committee.