

FRIENDS OF THE MARINO CONSERVATION PARK

Ms FOX (Bright) (15:34): It is appropriate in this National Volunteers Week that I raise the activity of a group of outstanding volunteers in the electorate of Bright. I recently attended the Friends of the Marino Conservation Park annual general meeting. The Friends of the Marino Conservation Park is a group of highly dedicated people committed to preserving this park, as well as the environment in general. The Marino Conservation Park was proclaimed in 1989 and was once part of the lands of the Kaurua people. The Friends of the Marino Conservation Park (who I shall perhaps refer to as 'the Friends' from hereon) work together with the Department for Environment and Heritage to protect the park's remnant coastal vegetation, as well as taking a hands on approach to returning the remainder of the park to a natural condition. This is extremely difficult.

The hands-on approach involves regular working bees to assist with the maintenance of the park, weed control, direct seeding, seed propagation and planting and watering of tube stock. In the past, the Friends have also mapped and counted threatened plant species and identified and photographed new species found in the park.

In 2007, I was very privileged to be appointed by the then minister for the environment (Hon. Gail Gago) as the Chair of the Hallett Cove and Marino Conservation Parks Community Reference Group, in preparation for the community draft management plan, which is now open for public comment until late June this year. Chairing this committee was very interesting (and it was interesting to listen to the member for Ashford, who talked about information and consultation and the difference between those two things) because I was able to assess for myself just how much expertise and knowledge the Friends bring to the day-to-day running and preservation of these places.

I really hope that the staff at DEH will incorporate the comments of residents and Friends into their plan, because I understand that there is some disquiet amongst the Friends about the draft management plan. In particular, I refer to concerns that the document will be of limited assistance to volunteers working in the parks, because the objectives and strategies summarising each section are very broad and generally suggest tasks that are appropriate for staff of DEH, rather than volunteers. As they stand in the draft plan, they provide guidance for volunteers on their day-to-day activities in the park—or, at least, that is what one would want.

Because of the work carried out by the Friends, many native plants have survived and continue to do so, and I think it is incumbent upon local members and the government departments in question to bear in mind that the collective knowledge and wisdom of Friends, such as these groups, should not be ignored. In reality, it is the Friends who keep the parks going. It is the Friends who monitor and maintain the area with help from the rangers and it is the Friends who are preserving this bio-heritage site for generations to come, and we ignore their input at our own peril.

Membership of the Friends of Marino Conservation Park is open to everyone. A large number of people have been financial members, but the physical work has been undertaken by a much smaller group. For the majority of the past 15 years, a very reliable group of less than 10 members has been working in the park for more than 10 years. As the majority of the members are 60 years of age or over, the group would encourage younger members of the community to become actively involved and help maintain and care for this park, but it does seem to be quite difficult to get younger people involved.

Nevertheless, the group's hard work, dedication and commitment is as strong as it has ever been. The group continually invites guest speakers to its meetings to gain further education about the ever-changing environment and climate and how this affects the park. I commend everyone involved in this group for taking such an active approach and for their high level of commitment to the Marino Conservation Park, especially at a time when our environment requires such attention. I am very proud to have them in my electorate.