

**New South Wales Speleological Council**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Saturday – 30th October 2021**

**10 AM Zoom Video Conference**

**Meeting opened:** 10:10 am

1. **Apologies:**Colin Tyrrell, Stephanie Murphy, Denis Marsh, Garry K. Smith

**Attendance:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **CLUB / S** | **PROXIES** | **REPRESENTATION**  **i.e. ASF COUNCILLOR ASF ASSOCIATE**  **ASF INDIVIDUAL OBSERVER/VISITOR** |
| Peter Dykes | CWSS |  | Councilor – CWSS |
| Roderick Smith | MSS/NHVSS | BMSC | Councilor – MSS & NHVSS |
| Lachlan Bailey | NUCC |  | Councilor – NUCC |
| Jill Rowling |  |  | KMAC |
| Mike Lake |  |  | Visitor |
| Cathy Brown | HCG |  | Councilor – HCG |
| David Smith |  |  | Visitor – NPWS (Wombeyan) |
| Emily Butcher | SUSS |  | Councilor – SUSS |
| Cathi Humphrey-Hood |  |  | Visitor – ASF Librarian |
| Rod Obrien |  |  | Visitor – ASF CDG |
| Keir Vaughn-Taylor |  |  | NSWSC Exec |
| Glenn Stalgis | RSS |  | Councilor – RSS |

**Rod** – I wish to note that SSS is now a member of ASF. As such they should have been invited to send a representative to this meeting. When sending out the invites I neglected to ensure the mailing list had been updated to include a SSS representative. I wish to apologise to SSS for my oversight.

Action Item – To ensure a SSS representative is added to the NSWSC mailing list (Rod)

1. Confirmation of minutes from meeting on 30/10/2021.
2. Matters Arising from previous minutes

* None

Minutes accepted (Moved – Cathy. / Seconded – Keir.)

1. Correspondence:
2. Received:

* Letter from SUSS regarding current COVID restrictions
* Letter regarding the use of rebreathers at Jenolan

1. Outgoing

* Meeting details
* Wombeyan submission

1. Recurring

* Emails and phone calls to Sophia Meehan – to organize a meeting between her and the NSWSC Executive
* Jenolan Caves regarding caver accommodation
* JCSRG, updates and feedback

1. President’s Report

**Peter** – Wombeyan has occupied a great deal of my time. Bruce Welch has supplied two bound copies of the Wombeyan proposal. There has been a lot of communication with Clare Buswell, Cathi Humphrey-Hood and others. It appears to be a for-gone conclusion. They are now ready to break ground.

I met the mayor of Oberon shire regarding Jenolan, with Bruce Welch. We all agreed on a number of things, including the desire to see most (all) of the buildings out of the valley. It’s currently looking like 5 mile will be closed indefinitely. The RTA manager has said the repair “will be a difficult task”. There is a belief that Jenolan must have an alternative exit, not a single entry point (an emergency exit). The RTA will close the 2 mile if 20mm of rain is forecast for any 24hr period up to a week in advance.

There is a proposal for a new information centre next to Caves House. We are all of the view it should be at the top of the hill, which would halve the costs. Also, the building is not in line with heritage listing. We all agreed that access to Jenolan would be much better via a gondola or tram. And to top it off, current parking is at the site of a rare plant species.

**Keir** – Did the Mayor say what he would be doing in relation to Jenolan?

**Peter** – All meetings at the moment. Mark (Oberon Mayor) wants more involvement/ownership in Jenolan. I intend to have further meetings with Mark.

1. Commission and Representative Reports
   1. KMAC (Karst Management Advisory Committee) - Jill  
       Attached.  
      **Jill** – KMAC meet with an extraordinary meeting 3rd May to discuss internal communication protocol. KMAC gets involved towards the end of the work, and we also get Sophia’s group asking for advice occasionally. There are concerns regarding the lack of consultation regarding the Wombeyan proposal. Also concerned amount the carrying capacity of visits to karst areas.

**Peter** – What’s the general feeling at KMAC regarding the Wombeyan proposal?  
**Jill** – The lack of consultation. There are a lot of silly things that made it out to the public that wouldn’t have if KMAC had been consulted first

* 1. BRAG (Bungonia Recreation Advisory Group) - Jill  
     **Jill** – There is no report due to no meeting. The last thing I heard was a long time ago. I suspect it’s been wound up. BRAG was originally set up because the mine was dropping rocks into the gorge and there was a proposal to extend the mine into the Bungonia Recreation Area, as it was known at the time. Because of the outcry, the minister formed the BRAG as a meeting of the interested groups. The groups to have long-term representation were ASF, NPWS, Schools, Army training and Police rescue. All other interested groups dropped off very early.

Action Item - To find out if BRAG still exists

* 1. NSW Caving Training Coordinator - Glenn  
     **Glenn** – I’ve been looking into what the purpose of the role is. Based on that I have proposed some suggestions. I want to coordinate training opportunities across NSW caving clubs. Some of the general areas I want to look at include:
* Movement around caves
* Trip planning and risk assessments
* Cave rescue (including building a relationship with cave rescue)
* Policies
* Conservation
* Technical and science, including cave mapping
* Environmental/biological surveys.
  1. Kosciuszko Speleo Reference Group (KSRG) – Beth Little  
      – Attached
  2. Cave and Karst Numbering Coordinator - Peter  
      – Verbal report given.

**Peter** – Bruce Howlett has provided a pile of maps and aerial photos. Joe Sydney has purchased 2 map filing cabinets for storage. More stuff has been donated from various people, slowly building the library.

**Jill** – Are you aware of the push from the UIS to include non-carbonate karst features?

**Peter** – The numbering system we have allows for this.

* 1. NSWSC Cave Diving Committee – Deb Johnson  
      - No report due to no activity

**Keir** – There has been some diving, including dives at Mt Fairy. Also, there was the meeting with NPWS regarding rebreathers at Jenolan.

* 1. Jenolan Caves Stakeholders Reference Group (JCSRG) – Stephanie Murphy  
      - Attached
  2. NSWSC Exec Report - Rod

- Attached

1. Treasurer’s Report

No report received

All reports accepted (Moved – Cathy. / Seconded – Emily.)

1. General Business
   1. Wombeyan

**Peter** – I’d like to welcome David, the manager here at Wombeyan. Can you give us your impressions of the Wombeyan upgrade proposal?  
**David** – I’m not sure what I can say, not being the project manager. Money definitely needs to be invested in this place. There is apparently 9.8 million dollars available, but that money is for the entire project, including consultation. My may concern is that whatever goes on the ground is fit for purpose. I am happy that a lot of the run-down buildings will be replaced. Especially the toilet blocks and some of the accommodation.

The camp ground is an issue on busy weekends. Perceptions of camping has changed over the years, now there is less tents and more vehicles.

Nowadays bookings are all done through a booking agency, we just get notifications, which is good in a way.

One of the aims of the project is to spread visitation throughout the year. Current visitation is very seasonal, and it is especially busy on long weekends like Easter.

There are a lot of positive aspects to this project. Another is that signage will be improved.

**Peter** – Will the access road be improved?

**David** – The access road is the responsibility of council. The road from the toilet block to the bottom carpark is the only road in scope for the project, and hopefully that will be improved.

There is nothing happening inside the caves at the moment. A lot of the infrastructure within the caves has been damaged recently due to flooding.

**Peter** – What about the platforms in the arch?

**David** – That’s probably the most contentious issue

**Peter** – I’m interested in how the proposal came about

**David** – The leverage for the funding came from running events. The Arch, with its natural acoustics and natural feeling is a big drawing point. That would be an ideal events space, especially with the grassed area in front of it. We have run some events and have been all well received.

**Lachlan** – If we object to the use in the arch will it undermine the project as a whole?

**David** – I don’t know.

**Cathi** – A lot of the problem is the lack of information from the project office

**Keir** – Peter, do you know about the aboriginal consultation?

**Peter** – This used to be a meeting place with groups from the coast and inland. I suspect there would be artefacts in the flat areas if you dug down 18 inches or so. And there has been no archeological considerations in this proposal. Wombeyan is the starting point of the Tiger Quoll Dreaming Track. This is Gundungurra tradition lands, and there is a land use agreement, but this there is nothing in the proposal.

**Cathy** – Is there anything this meeting can do?

**Peter** – After speaking to Clare, basically no. David, how long have you known about this?

**David** – Regarding the indigenous consultation, since the floods we have had extensive site surveys by indigenous groups.

**Peter** – There are 2 reports on the site that we can’t get access to. Both of them are indigenous reports

**Cathy** – Whether the aboriginals have been consults is not our concern

**Lachlan** – From our perspective we’ve got issues with the plan, so we’ve looked at it and seen other issues.

**Mike** – What’s the best way of getting our concerns to the planning committee? My main concern is the viewing platform. I feel most of the proposal is fine, so going ahead with the bulk of the project wouldn’t be a problem.

**David** – There were a lot of ideas thrown up initially. A lot will be culled due to finances.

**Peter** – The question boils down to, what are our grievances, and what are we going to do? We’re not going to object to upgrading the buildings, more signs, fixing the existing roads, etc. 90% of the plan we are happy with. We just need to nail down the 10% we are not happy with, and what we are going to do about it. After speaking to Clare Buswell, the only option is to go to the media. Who is going to stand up in the media? The lack of consultation, the cave impact and hydrology impact.

Dave, are you going to be upset if we go to the media?

**David** – I’m not officially involved.

**Peter** – The substantive issue is the platform in the arch. The other issues are archeological surveys of anything pulled down and not interfering with natural drainage.

**Rod** – I agree, except for the lack of consultation.

**Keir** – Penny Sharp is on side.

**Peter** – Thursday this week Ian Eddison and myself are going to meet with Penny Sharp in her office. Including Marilyn Scott. We need to be seen as ..

**Keir** – A diverse and talented group

**Peter** – Exactly. We may need to do something on the 7:30 report.

**Cathy** – There’s pros and cons with that

**Peter** – Precisely. My argument is the governments want a return on investment of national parks. Which the only way you can do it is to develop the hell out of it. The arch proposal is the big money-spinner.

**Mike** – I’m not sure if a few events during the year would bring in more than the camping.

**David** – The caves are the main draw card here. Then people staying do more tours, spend money in the gift shop etc.

**Cathy** – We need to focus on the caves being the main drawcard, and we need to focus on the caves remain natural.

**Keir** – We need to make some action items

**Peter** – Go for it

**Keir** – We need to respond to Griffin.

**Mike** – They should consider the potential for finding artefacts where the viewing platform is going in. Also there has been insufficient study on the impact to the stromatilites.

**Keir** – Approach Patrick Larkin.

**Peter** – We’re annoyed by the lack of consultation.

**Mike** – Should we have a pre-emptive motion to go to the media

**Rod** – Won’t be enough, there will discussions about what to say

**Cathy** – Why go to Penny?

**Peter** – To put pressure on the minister behind this.

Action items – Meeting with Penny Sharp. Worry about media after that. Keir to respond to Griffin.

Motion – If meeting with Penny is unsuccessful the council authorize the exec to formalize a media response.

Moved Lachlan, Seconded Emily. All in favour

**Cathy** – I propose the council give a vote of thanks to all the work Clare has done. <All agreed>

* 1. Jenolan

**Emily** – Are we getting more permanent accommodation?  
**Lachlan** – We have accommodation at the top of 5 mile but it is not usable due to damage from floods and mould

**Peter** – I’ll give a commitment to meet Jodie Anderson once she returns but I need some experts to join me. SUSS (Phil Maynard) and SSS () are the best options.

I’ve spoken to Julia James about the show caves mapping project. There will be three copies produced, one for the ASF library and one for the SSS library. I’ve asked for a copy to be provided to NSW.

Future projects we should make sure there is guarantee that the data goes someone.

* 1. Yagby

**Jill** – A new plan of management has been released to the public

**Lachlan** – I had a meeting with management regarding permits. This was because SUSS had had a request for a caving permit that had gone round the adminisphere in NPWS and no response was forthcoming. The reason was that it was the first cave diving permit the new manager had had to deal with. We have been assured that future cave diving permits should happen within normal timeframes.

* 1. COVID

**Peter** – I’m not interested in arguing about COVID requirements.

Motion – That the NSWSC talk to NPWS management regarding the COVID requirements.

Moved Lachlan, Seconded Glenn. All in favour

* 1. IT Report  
      - Attached
  2. Mt Etna trip.

**Rod** – I am currently organizing a trip to Mt Etna. This came about because there was/is a proposal to extend the mine which brought Mt Etna back into the forefronts of people’s minds. Most of the documentation, where it exists, is very outdated. So the primary objective is to bring the documentation up to a modern standard.

Along with that, I’ll be asking everyone to spend one day helping Noel Sands with a revegetation project he is running up there. But I won’t be “cracking the whip” for the trip, people will be welcome to take or day or two off and not 12 hour days, unless people want to do that. It is recommended that a visit to the Capricorn Caves is definitely worth it.

The trip dates will be the 25th of July to the 5th August, allowing for the weekends on either end for travelling.

* 1. Dip cave

Lachlan – The mess is ongoing. There is now a different project manager. It looks like they’ve moved away from the shotcrete plan. We’ve been told that the current plan is to remove as much contaminated material as possible before putting in a liner and stairs to move people past the contaminated area quickly.

On an aside they were looking at putting in restrictions on access.

* 1. **Jill** – has anyone seen the Gardens of Stone plan of management?

Elections

President – Peter

Executive – Glenn, Keir, Lachlan, Rod

1. Elections

President

Nominations: Peter Dykes – Elected

Executive

Nominations: Glenn Stalgis – Elected

Keir Vaughn-Taylor – Elected

Lachlan Bailey – Elected

Rod Smith – Elected

1. Proposal for next meeting

22 October 2022 – Kempsey (to be confirmed)

1. Close of meeting

Around 14:36