

1<sup>st</sup> October 2010

## Bushcare forum brings positive outcomes

On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September a Bushcare forum was held by Shoalhaven City Council to address the concerns raised by Shoalhaven Bushcare Groups regarding a resolution that was passed by Council at the July Council meeting calling for a report from staff regarding possible changes to the Bushcare Policy.

The meeting was well attended with 48 Bushcare representatives in attendance as well as 7 Councillors and 7 staff members. Presentations were given by Shoalhaven Mayor, Cllr Paul Green, to explain the rational and community representations that led to the Council resolution to review the policy. Councils Parks Operations Manager, Brett Carter explained the current Bushcare Program and the legal framework. John Hawksworth on behalf of the Bushcare groups spoke about the impact of Council's decisions on the volunteers.

Following the formal presentations the floor of the forum was opened up for questions from individual Bushcare groups.

The Bushcare groups expressed their views in a positive and constructive way. During this time some very positive dialogue was exchanged between the Bushcare group and Council in which both parties left with a far greater appreciation of the constraints and efforts being made by Bushcare volunteers and the need for Councillors to represent the views of all ratepayers.

Some positive outcomes from the Bushcare Forum were:

1. The Bushcare Groups provide a valuable and much appreciated effort to assisting Council with managing its natural areas across the city and that Council core business is to continue to support the work of volunteer Bushcare groups.
2. Council was committed to build on and strengthen the communication between Bushcare Groups and Councillors
3. Communication between the Bushcare groups, Council staff and Councillors would be strengthened by holding consultative meetings at least annually.
4. A need to investigate providing more education on key environmental issues to the public, Councillors and other stakeholders, particularly relating to the management of the coastal ecology

The Bushcare forum was a positive step forward for both the Bushcare Volunteers and Councillors. Bill Paterson, Director of City Services and Operations called for further written submissions from Bushcare groups regarding issues raised at the forum. Bill stated that “This forum has given both Council and the volunteers some positive ideas that we can both move forward to practically implement so that future conflicts can be avoided”.

Council will continue discussions with volunteers and government agencies such as the Catchment Authority in examining the issues raised by Council and the community before a report on the Policy issue is brought back to council for consideration.

**CONTACT:** Director City Services and Operations Bill Paterson (02) 4429 3298