

UBC article on fate of the Darling Range Regional Park.

What has happened to the Darling Range Regional Park since it was first announced in 1990, with well-deserved fanfare? In the intervening 26 years, the Park (now under the banner of The Parks of the Darling Range yet, fortunately identified as Mundy Regional Park), still awaits a management plan. Like other long-serving and long-suffering members of its Community Advisory Committee, I despair of ever seeing this management plan.

This depressing picture is despite the best efforts of a series of Chairs, community members, local government representatives and on-ground and behind-the-scenes DPaW staff. The huge amount of time and effort expended by these individuals has, however, not been totally wasted. The committee's stewardship of those areas agreed to be within the park has ensured that problems threatening the values within the park, are tackled as they arise and, that community concerns are addressed. Given the apparent lack of historical "memory" within local and state government bodies, a brief history of the topic seems in order.

The proposal to establish the Darling Range Regional Park was first announced in 1990. A draft document was released in 1993, attracting 120 submissions supporting the proposal, including one from the Shire of Kalamunda. The Minister for Planning released the final Park proposal in October 1995.

Since an amendment to the MRS was required to secure the land required for the Park, MRS amendment 978/33 (1996) was advertised for public comment. This *'Darling Range Regional Park Amendment'* was unambiguous both in the chosen title and in its aim to secure areas of land for the Regional Park, proposing, in part, *'...the reservation of an additional 15,000 hectares of State or Local Government owned or vested land for inclusion into the Regional Park'*. The local governments involved were: *'Shires of Swan, Mundaring, Kalamunda and Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Cities of Armadale and Gosnells.'* The Darling Range Regional Park was proclaimed in the Government Gazette of 22 November 1996, which declared amendment 978/33 as taking effect *"on and from 14 November 1996."*

The Darling Range Regional Park Community Advisory Committee was a natural development of the *'Interim Management Committee'* intended to be established *'as soon as possible following the completion of the current amendment'* by the Department of Conservation and Land Management. It appears to be at this point that not ALL lands proposed for inclusion in the Regional Park under Kalamunda's K13 proposal were transferred to CALM for management.

The Darling Range Regional Park retained its name until 2004. However, following a review of the DRRP, an examination of a 'Parks of the Perth Hills concept' and the establishment of five new national parks, from January 2004, the management of The Department of Conservation and Land Management lands was declared to be in accordance with this 'Parks of Perth Hills' concept. It was declared that: *'From March 2004, a series of existing national parks and state forest will replace Darling Range Regional Park and will be managed under the title Parks of the Perth Hills.'* (Parks of the Perth Hills Stakeholder Presentation October 2003).

Despite the above declaration, over time, the changes of name of this regional Park Community Advisory Committee have proved confusing, e.g. Parks of the Darling Range C.A.C. (2005), Darling Range C.A.C. (2007 – 2010), and, again, Parks of the Darling Range C.A.C. (2012 to present).

Nature Reserves Preservation Group (NRPG), having been represented on these committees for over 15 years, has, for the past three years, been campaigning to save a block of pristine bushland (Reserve 30314). Rezoned as Parks and Recreation under Kalamunda proposal K.13 in 1996, for inclusion in the Darling Range Regional Park, this reserve is subject to a Metropolitan Region Scheme amendment (1271/41) proposing to deprive it of that P&R designation.

Reserve 30314, Lot 59 Wilkins Road, was undoubtedly intended for inclusion in the Regional Park, together with the other K13 reserves. Since 1996, no motion has been passed, nor gazettal made to exclude it from the Park. These facts have not prevented the current MRS amendment (1271/41) being prosecuted with enthusiasm by Kalamunda Council staff and Councillors and, by the local Member for Kalamunda, both in his role as local member and in that of his recent past role as Minister for Planning.

Whilst the fate of reserve 30314 and other reserves intended for inclusion in this park are of great concern, systemic failings within the current conservation system may prove to be of even greater importance. Past failures to place reserves (as intended) under the management of CALM/DPaW/DEC, the current lack of protection for Bush Forever sites and P&R designated reserves, together with a failure to provide the management plan for this Regional Park emphasise the extent of these failings.

The current Parks of the Darling Range Community Advisory Committee is continuing to work towards the creation of a management plan for the parks. In this effort, community members have the support of representatives of member Councils and of the Regional Parks unit of DPaW. The extensive work performed by on-ground operation staff of DPaW is an indication of their commitment to the parks. Community concerns brought to the table, are attended to promptly, despite the exponentially increasing heavy workload.

I must stress that this article is representative solely of my views as President of the Nature Reserves Preservation Group. Official comments or statements on behalf of the Advisory Committee, come only through the Chair of that committee. Whilst I remain the NRPG representative on the Community Advisory Committee, my views do not necessarily reflect those of other Advisory Committee members.

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