

A message from the fotpin Coordinating Committee

Dear fotpins

This note is to provide you with some background to Mervyn Aston's letter, and an initial response and recommendations for the motions in that letter.

The Committee was delighted when we learnt Mervyn had joined our group, and of the knowledge and experience he might bring, to the benefit of the Pinnacle Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, Mervyn has not yet contributed in the way that we had hoped.

Mervyn has been critical of the Native Grass Restoration Project, the Weed Plan, our approach to controlling saffron thistles, the way Committee operates, the proposed CSO program and the holding of the Australia Day BBQ. While we welcome constructive comments, Mervyn has not provided evidence to substantiate or acknowledge the reasons for his criticisms of these fotpin activities, some of which are the same as other Parkcare groups. We are willing to furnish members copies of his email communications and criticisms, subject to Mervyn's approval, along with our responses.

Regarding Mervyn's motions, in the order they appear in his letter:

1. "Volunteer Parkcare Groups" are not defined by the ACT Government (nor the ACT Natural Resource Management Plan). The ACT's Volunteer Policy defines *volunteers* and how they should behave - but does not define "groups" as such.

Our management rules define us as a "group". Clause 4 states that we operate under the auspices of the ACT Government, and that our focus is protecting a component of the Canberra Nature Park. Along with our being unpaid, this leaves little doubt that we are a "Volunteer Parkcare Group". Prior to Mervyn's letter, Committee had decided to recommend that the rules be amended to make specific reference to the ACT's Parkcare Volunteer Policy, as a guide for members; this policy has been linked to our website since the latter was launched. This motion therefore seems to have no basis and we recommend that it be rejected by fotpin members.

2. As argued above, our management rules define us as a Volunteer Parkcare Group, and guide the group's functions by setting out our aims and policies by way of *goals, objectives* and *strategies*. The effectiveness and democratic nature of our rules is demonstrated by the actioning of Mervyn's request for a Requested General Meeting lodged under the provisions of those rules.

Since our first meeting as a formal group on the 25th July 2010, which adopted the current Management Rules, the committee has been working to improve them, including considering fotpin members' input. A revised draft of the rules is about to be sent to you for another round of comments and adjustments prior to our first AGM in July. Committee understood from our July meeting that members wished for simple rules, and for as little interference as possible in the activities of the group by their adoption.

Unincorporated organisations such as fotpin have "rules" rather than a "constitution". Our rules are based on "model rules" prepared by the ACT Government and are very similar to the constitution of Friends of Aranda Bushland. There is no additional value in calling our rules a "constitution" and may, given we are unincorporated, be misleading. We therefore recommend that this motion also be rejected by fotpin members.

3. Fotpin members have already discussed and decided on the group's general policy expressed through our *goals*, *objectives* and *strategies*. This was researched and developed by 6 volunteer "working group" members, 3 of whom are not on Committee. How fotpins implement those strategies must rely on a range of factors including their interests, energy, and teamwork.

Ultimately, as volunteers, we can do as we wish as long as we act consistently with the ACT's Volunteer Policy. We are concerned that it would be counter-productive and contrary to the nature of volunteering for any meeting of fotpins, including Committee meetings, to prescribe to fotpins what they may, and by implication may not, do at the Pinnacle. We therefore recommend that this motion be rejected by fotpin members.

At our first AGM in July we will be able to elect all positions to committee as is appropriate in any representative and democratic group. In July, the broader membership of some 45 people (if they are in attendance) will be able to approve or amend the draft rules which entrench this right. The members will have the opportunity to provide further input to the draft rules after their circulation in March. This was communicated to members in our Update #4 sent January 2011, which can be read at www.fotpin.org.au/newsletters.html.

4. Members have been able to suggest ideas, activities, priorities and their preferences on our intentionally comprehensive membership form. Since 18th December there has also been an open invitation on our website (at www.fotpin.org.au/about.html) for members to contribute suggestions - formalising and making easier an already existing understanding with members implied by the contents of our membership form.

The group has always - before and since formalisation - operated using email and the World Wide Web as the main form of communication, interaction and feedback. Although we would be willing to, we don't believe that members in general wish us to plan, organise, facilitate, compile and report on a series of meetings. Holding member meetings is something fotpins in attendance at our first members' meeting in 2010 explicitly did not wish to do. We believe this motion is inconsistent with the clear messages we've received from fotpins, and therefore we recommend that this motion be rejected by fotpin members.

5. As a matter of principle Committee does not support any motion that might lead to a meeting of fotpins directing any other fotpins to suspend activities that are consistent with our goals and with the improvement of the reserve, including weeding. We believe this motion, if carried, would be harmful to our group and prejudice positive outcomes for the reserve. Further, weeding is widely accepted as the most useful initial activity of any Parkcare group in the ACT; and is the first main activity listed on the websites of each of our fellow Parkcare groups. We therefore recommend that this motion be rejected by fotpin members.

In conclusion, if Committee has not responded to the needs of all fotpins, then we apologise. Please bear in mind that the group only formed in late July 2010, that we have had only four Committee meetings of length since then, mostly dealing with establishment issues, formalising activities already underway, and identifying opportunities (such as the proposed CSO program) to resource priorities discussed at the July meeting. We hope you find the explanations above helpful, and look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

kind regards
fotpin Coordinating Committee
27.02.2011