



Marc Hendrikx 2nd left, with AFA Committee members, Hugh Hodgkinson, Garry Gowen, Joan Webb and Terry Hart.

A Warning from Mt Warning

Access For All held it's AGM last Sunday at the Servicemens Club in Braidwood. The guest speaker was Marc Henrickx from Berowra, president of a group called Save our Summits.

Marc delivered a strong message about loss of public access, involving the closure permanently to everyone except Aboriginal people by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) after it declared Mt Warning to be 'a place of sacred ceremonies linked to traditional law and custom,' particular to the Bundjalung nation.

Mt Warning in Northern NSW is one of the biggest shield volcanoes in the southern hemisphere and is surrounded by breathtakingly beautiful scenery, which has drawn visitors to it since the mid-1800s. Since then, bushwalkers who have made the difficult climb to the summit have been rewarded with superb views of subtropical forests and the coast.

Marc stated, "there are conflicting indigenous claims. Before she died in 2007, Marlene Boyd, an elder of the Ngarakwal people, gave an interview in which she stated that Mt Warning had nothing to do with the Bundjalung nation but rather the traditional custodians of Mt Warning were the Ngarakwal/Nganduwal people".

What is more, she was very happy for everyone to climb the mountain, stating emphatically that, "I do not oppose the public climbing of Mt Warning [Wollumbin]- how can the public experience the spiritual significance of this land if they do not climb the summit and witness creation!"

As Marc pointed out the Bundjalung nation are not the traditional owners. Mt Warning has always been part of the Ngarakwal/Nganduwal people. National Parks Management have accepted a flawed claim, resulting lack of access to public land.

Understandably, the banning of non-Aboriginals from this area of outstanding natural beauty has not gone down very well at all with the general public. Significant numbers of whom have continued to climb the summit with admirable impunity.

It has come to light that NPWS has been paying security guards \$7,000 per week to keep nonindigenous people away, having spent a total of just over \$100,000 since April. A taxpayer-funded government agency has been using tax-payer dollars to keep taxpayers from climbing the mountain.

Marc has recently been fined for climbing the mountain and as he explained on a recent interview on SkyNews he will contest the fine in court. Marc believes the Mt Warning ban is just the beginning. We have already seen others such as The Grampians in Victoria, Uluru in NT and soon the Horizontal Falls in WA.

What worries Access for All is that the Minns government has adopted the policy of the previous liberal government that is to give all the NSW parks to Aboriginal groups that live within the vicinity of those parks, including land titles and management rights. That involves 10% of the state and 43% of the coast. The Government has further stated that it expects to have handed everything back in the next 15 to 20 years.

What future claims will affect access to National Parks by the public?