

ADJOURNMENT

Ngarang-Wal Gold Coast Aboriginal Association

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (9.49 p.m.)—On Thursday, 12 June I visited the Pine Ridge Conservation Park at Runaway Bay where the Ngarang-Wal Gold Coast Aboriginal Association Inc. has completed an important project of protective and remedial work of the midden site at this location. Headed by Tony Dillon and involving many dedicated, hardworking people, the project is of historic and cultural significance to the local Indigenous people of the Gold Coast. The project had a federal government contribution of \$61,000 approved under the previous Howard government towards the protection of this site of importance to both Aboriginal and Gold Coast history, with additional contributions from state and local governments and other organisations.

I am pleased that the federal government could support the Ngarang-Wal Aboriginal Association through the Indigenous Heritage Program. These kinds of projects are exactly what government grants should be about—providing funds to a community to deliver for that community. Archaeological evidence suggests that Aboriginal people had inhabited the Gold Coast region for many years before European settlement. By the early 1800s there were eight distinct family groups living between the Tweed and Coomera rivers. Collectively they were known as Kombumerri people and spoke the Yugambah language, although there is evidence of at least four distinct dialects in the region.

The Pine Ridge site has shown itself as an historically important site, with bones, knives, stone tools and shells found in the area. The site was an established meeting place for Aboriginal people, with traces of Aboriginal camps and bora rings still visible in the area into the 1950s, before development overtook the land. Nearby to the site, remains of a local Indigenous person have recently been discovered as a local road was widened. The local people intend to bury the remains within the protected site.

This is a significant area for many reasons. The site protects the last example of the vegetation called Wallum-heath and is the last surviving area where Aboriginal people clearly camped on the Gold Coast. So much of the Gold Coast's Indigenous history has been lost, so this last bastion of Aboriginal history should be maintained. It was lucky in many ways that the site was discovered. The diggings of bandicoots at the site, surely not an animal regularly seen in the heart of suburban Gold Coast, uncovered small dinner camp middens on the site, with further investigation leading to the discovery of no fewer than 187 of these small middens or sit-down places where local families spent multiple days taking advantage of the ocean's resources for nourishment.

The site has played host to not only bandicoots, but up until at least recently was also the home to echidnas, koalas and wallabies—all in the heart of the Gold Coast. The vegetation on the site is significant to local Aboriginal history because it produced food, bark, timber for weapons and medicines for the local people. Local Indigenous people came to the area from early winter and into winter as the mullet travelled up the east coast. They would build up as huge schools south of Sydney and travel beyond Moreton Bay in the winter time, arriving on the Gold Coast around April. It was obvious when the right time to come to the area was, as there were certain vegetation types that would flower and certain birds would travel down from the mountains at the same time.

The Kombumerri people at the time of the creation of these middens were a coastal people, the prefix of the word translating to 'folk' and the suffix

translating to 'teredo', a delicacy eaten by the local people, attracted to casuarina logs floating in the saltwater shallows. They interacted with the Indigenous people of Stradbroke and Moreton islands at a time when Stradbroke was not broken up into a north island and a south island, as it is now, but was one before the separation changed the nature of the Gold Coast Broadwater forever.

The Pine Ridge project is evidence that, with the appropriate support, protection of the Gold Coast Aboriginal heritage can be achieved. There are additional areas on the Gold Coast that also deserve similar protection. Just recently, additional artefacts were discovered on South Stradbroke Island and, while evidence of previous inhabitants can be found all over the island, the ocean side of the island needs attention. Another midden is on the water at Coombabah Lakelands, where three axe heads were recently found. The area is protected to an extent. An area at Saltwater Creek is also protected and has been fenced off. Over 3,600 artefacts were found recently at Gaven, part of a ridge that formed a walking track to Paradise Point.

These sites should be protected. Should the Ngarang-Wal Gold Coast Aboriginal Association decide on an appropriate course of action to preserve these sites, they should be supported by grants under the Indigenous Heritage program. I look forward to supporting them in applying for those grants. Our history is what unites us. It completes us in that it tells us of what came before, of people and places from a different time, of a past we never lived but long to know of. I look forward to working with all people on the northern Gold Coast.