

Victorian Environmental Friends Network Inc

Activity Report on Behalf of the Committee AGM 2019 – November 30 2019

Following the achievement of Charity status in 2018, our (pro-bono) lawyers applied for Deductible Gift Recipient status which opens the possibility of yet more grants, where philanthropic foundations require donations be tax deductible. This has not yet proceeded awaiting legislative change.

In 2018 we received government grants for training and network development activities, and this year we have continued the program of events including workshops in the South East (held at the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens); Geelong (including South Western Vic); a Strategic Planning workshop; an expanded Social Media Workshop; a very popular Digital Storytelling workshop; and an Environmental Stewardship workshop in conjunction with Gardens For Wildlife. Early next year we are hoping to be involved with another Regional Workshop in Ballarat (together with Ballarat Environment network) and a networking Forum focused on Grant Writing and Recruitment (in conjunction with First Friends Of Dandenong Creek).

Once again a positive and enjoyable Best Friends Award event was held (with special thanks to Judy Ingram for organisation). It is a great way to share the enormous work Friends groups do over many years. Funding for the Best Friends Awards continues State Government support via DELWP for this important activity and signals some acknowledgement by the Government of the vital work of Friends groups and their individual members.

We acknowledge the work of Rod Taylor over recent years in DELWP who has been a strong supporter of Environmental Volunteering within DELWP. He has moved on to other challenges in the Department but has left a significant legacy.

In continuing the task of raising the profile of VEFN as a representative organisation we have been involved in a number of consultative meetings. This included with DELWP via Paul Strickland and Nadine Gaskill being appointed to the Minister's "Environmental Volunteering Expert Advisory Group"; Committee consultations for DELWP's training project; contributions to DELWP's Environmental Volunteering database (for which extra special thanks is due to Judy Ingram); Paul Strickland's involvement in the Landcare Facilitator's Review and participating as a Judge in the new Landcare Awards category of Environmental Volunteering; numerous meetings with Parks Victoria senior staff (in some cases with Landcare Victoria Inc) on volunteers working in Parks and more recently on the development of a Parks Vic Land Management Strategy (with much thanks due to Kate Forster in particular for keeping on the case, and Laura Mumaw for some astute wording suggestions); and a meeting with a Federal funded program on Rabbits and Weeds (thanks to Andrew Lucas).

Initial contacts have been made with Melbourne Water and the Municipal Association of Victoria to see what appropriate level of engagement will promote the interests of Friends Groups working across those land tenures.

Our cooperation with other like-minded environmental organisations has included the development of an MOU with Landcare Victoria Inc. (which will be formalised later today) and Paul Strickland's involvement as a Council Member of Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA).

We look forward to further developing our links with relevant organisations next year, including with Traditional Owner organisations.

We produced a Position Statement for the State election which was circulated to the major parties, and promoted in media releases with Landcare Victoria and VNPA.

More recently we have produced a comprehensive submission to the Parks Vic Land Management Strategy which is likely to involve further work early next year. While not all our members and Friends groups work on the Parks estate, it is a major focus for many, so Parks Victoria must inevitably be a significant part of our liaison and advocacy activity.

Stephen Derrick has continued to maintain a dynamic newsletter as editor, and we have recently had positive recognition from members of the Rabbits and Weeds Project (see above) about its interest and value to the wider environmental movement. Stephen's role as editor depends on members submitting interesting articles, so please consider taking up this challenge.

Our committee has been generously served by Paul Strickland, Convenor; Kate Forster Deputy Convenor; Margaret Hunter; Secretary, Roger Parker, Treasurer; Nadine Gaskell, Judy Ingram, Andrew Lucas and Laura Mumaw, who are all also actively contributing to more local volunteering endeavours.

Organisationally, your Committee has recently concluded the development of a Strategy Plan which is presented today for feedback. This will be a helpful guide for our future activities, though is a long agenda which emphasises the importance of increasing the participation of members in Committee activities.

We need more people to support and sustain the work of the VEFN committee, and hope groups will encourage able members to step forward to make this contribution by joining the committee. The committee currently meets bimonthly, with committee members able to participate via telephone or digital link up if necessary.

Over the year we have had an encouraging response to the shift to membership with a small fee, and now approach 50 paid up member groups. We still clearly have a task to convert many current "unpaid affiliate" groups to paid up members. This is important, not only for the role of VEFN as a representative organisation, but to provide a very basic funding base not dependant on outside organisations (government or other), to ensure an independent voice. In any event much grant funding does not contribute to essential infrastructure (such as website, insurance and other administration costs).

The benefits of the VEFN to the environmental Friends community remain information, connection, support and advocacy through:

- Website, Facebook and newsletter, Regional networking meetings including speakers and workshops
- Linking Friends to knowledgeable support and advice
- Advocacy for all groups across Victoria with Government and authorities
- Fostering awareness and recognition of Friends groups' contribution.

We have tried to summarise this clearly in the vision, mission and objectives for our new strategy plan (see attached).



Victorian Environment **FRIENDS NETWORK**

Our Vision

Protecting, restoring and enhancing the Victorian natural environment through community Friends Groups volunteering for their special places and native species.

Our Mission

1. One voice to champion Friends Groups to Governments and authorities
2. Empower Friends Groups to achieve their objectives
3. Promote the value of Friends Groups to the community
4. Support Friends Groups to connect to their communities and get them involved
5. Help Friends Groups support each other through regional networking

Our Objectives

1. Provide support, advice, training and networking opportunities for Friends Groups
2. Advocate to Governments and authorities for increased funding, support and recognition for Friends Groups
3. Promote the value of the natural environment, Friends Groups and their work to the community
4. Ensure the long term sustainability of Victorian Environment Friends Network

Group Membership is \$20 (financial year)

Membership benefits:

- ~ Website & newsletter
- ~ Regional networking
- ~ Speakers & workshops
- ~ Support & advice
- ~ Advocacy for all groups
- ~ Community recognition

Website <https://friendsvic.org> [VEFN Facebook](#)