



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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See our [web site](#)

VEFN 2019 AGM

A good crowd of 22 people attended the 2019 Annual General Meeting of VEFN held on 30 November and elected a new and enlarged committee.

In opening the meeting Convenor Paul Strickland joked “in a Trumpian manner” that it was one of the best attended such meetings VEFN has ever had.



Paul Strickland addresses VEFN AGM

The VEFN Committee adopted its Activity Report which outlined a very busy year for the volunteers on the committee. You can find the full report later in this edition.

The Treasurer’s report indicated a solid financial situation with funds available as at 30 June 2019 of over \$21,000. However, it was noted with the strong caution that as it reflects the situation as at the end of June, substantial funds have been subsequently spent or committed for further workshops.

The Committee election was that overseen by special guest Terry Hubbard, Deputy President of Landcare Victoria Inc. and the following were elected:

Convenor – Paul Strickland (Friends of Mt Worth State Park)

Deputy Convenor – vacant

Secretary – Margaret Hunter (Friends of Braeside Park/Edithvale Seaford Wetlands (FESWI))

Treasurer – Roger Parker (Friends of Mt Worth State Park)

Ordinary Members -

Chanaka Ruwandiya (First Friends of Dandenong Creek/Effect the Change)

Laura Mumaw (Gardens for Wildlife (Victoria))

Judy Ingram (Friends of Maribyrnong Valley Inc)

Andrew Lucas (Friends of Yarra Valley)

Nadine Gaskell (Gardens for Wildlife (Victoria))

Judith Baldacchino (Friends of Edwards Point)

Lap Chieu (First Friends of Dandenong Creek)

Tony Flude (Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery and Landcare Inc)

Anthony Bigelow (First Friends of Dandenong Creek)

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Suggestions for articles for FriendsNET are welcome. Please email to ecosystems@bigpond.com . If you want to include photos, please send as separate files in jpeg format, preferably in landscape.

Disclaimer: Content in this newsletter does not necessarily represent the views of the VEFN committee. Articles are the responsibility of authors as named. All other content is the responsibility of the editor, Stephen Derrick.

VEFN AGM 2019 continued

The meeting then witnessed the signing of a MOU between Landcare Victoria Inc and VEFN by Paul Strickland and Terry Hubbard, which can be viewed [here](#).



Paul Strickland and Terry Hubbard sign the MoU

The meeting then enjoyed the presentation of a number of short films for Friends groups out of the recent “Digital Storytelling” workshops, and others. Kate Forster was particularly thanked for the excellent organisation and presentation of that workshop.

Paul Strickland
Convenor, VEFN

Volunteer grants open

Friends Groups and a wide range of environmental volunteer groups are eligible to apply for funding through this program just opened by the Federal Department of Social Services, Family and Communities Program. Grants between \$1,000 and \$5,000 are available and applications must be initiated through an Expression of Interest to be lodged with your local Federal member of Parliament. Each of the 151 federal electorates has a total of \$66,000 to distribute, so competition will be strong.

Grants can be used for the following:

- purchase eligible small equipment items for use by volunteers.
- contribute to volunteers’ fuel costs.
- contribute to transport costs for volunteers with disability who are unable to drive in association with their volunteering activity.
- assist with the costs of training courses for volunteers.

- undertake background screening checks for volunteers.

More detail on the program can be found [here](#) and the latest version of the guidelines [here](#).

Deadlines for submission of your Expression of Interest to your local Federal member vary, but most seem to be around mid-February. If your group is interested to apply get in touch with your Federal Member as soon as possible to confirm dates.

Logging of native forest in Victoria to cease by 2030

In early November, the Victorian Premier announced that logging of native forest would be phase down from 2024 with native timber supply then being stepped down from then until it stops in 2030. You can read the Premier’s announcement [here](#).

This sounds like a good move and the simultaneous release of the [Greater Glider Action Statement](#) and the immediate cessation of logging in old growth forests are good for the environment.

But there is much work to be done to ensure that the new regime is set in legislation. Environment Victoria commended the Victorian Government, calling it a “courageous decision”. However, Jono La Nauze, CEO of Environment Victoria noted that **“The missing detail we still need to see is the plan for permanent protecting these forests in new national parks including the Great Forest National Park, and the Emerald Link in East Gippsland.”** See Environment Victoria’s full commentary [here](#).

Victorian National Parks Association Executive Director, Matt Ruchel commented on the creation of 96,000 hectares of “Immediate Protection Areas”, saying “These ‘Immediate Protection Areas’ have no legislative basis as yet. They are a political commitment, which will need legislation or regulation to be properly secured into the future. A consultation process will commence early next year on “the best way to permanently protect the Immediate Protection Areas”. Other criticisms by VNPA are that the way in which old growth forest is defined is open to interpretation; some highly sensitive areas of old growth forest will continue to be logged until 2024 and that there is a risk that logging may accelerate in the short term in already seriously depleted Mountain Ash forests in the Central Highlands region. Read Matt Ruchel’s full comment [here](#).

DELWP maps environmental volunteering in Victoria

DELWP has released the first version of an online interactive map of groups that undertake environmental volunteering.

The interactive map can be found [here](#) and you can check whether your group is listed and contact DELWP if you want to update your information or add your group. DELWP has also released [Volunteering Naturally 2019](#), which is a collation of data about environmental volunteer groups in Victoria. You can find this report and other documents at <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/volunteering>.

VEFN at Rally for Nature

On 28 November, VEFN were on the steps of Victorian Parliament with Shane Howard and some 40 other groups to call on the Government to provide greater support for the State's special places.

Speaking to the Rally VEFN Convenor Paul Strickland said that Friends groups create, enhance and are custodians of a special part of the environment being a place or species.

"Over many years state funding for parks and reserves has been cut at both state and municipal level. Volunteers are too often picking up the slack when Government funding falls short." he said.

"Although recent years has seen some improvement in state government funding, on-ground parks staff have not returned to the anything like the levels prior to the swingeing cuts of the 1990's. The Water authority Parks charge which some communities pay is unfair and now inadequate, and it has even been raided for non-parks activity."

"The result is that feral animals and plants are rampant in many Parks, and enforcement of rules designed to protect our natural gems is often at token levels. Access is compromised and the benefits of access to nature is increasingly limited while the population grows."

"You can stand for nature not just today but into the future by joining one of the groups speaking here today or one of the many Friends groups out on the front line."

Paul Strickland
VEFN Convenor

Coastcare Victoria strategy 2020 - 2025

Coastcare Victoria has been operating for 25 years. A [draft strategy](#) has been developed to guide the program for the next 5 years. You can review the Draft Coastcare Victoria Strategy 2020-2025 and have your say through an online survey [here](#).

Arthur Rylah Institute Terrestrial Quarterly Update

The Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI) recently launched a new subscription, the [Terrestrial Quarterly Update](#), which provides a summary of the latest ARI projects and scientific achievements of our Terrestrial ecology researchers which includes research on:

- Threatened flora and fauna
- Spatial modelling (including machine learning)
- Environmental watering
- Vegetation ecology
- Fire ecology
- Ecological risk assessment, and
- Pest and Wildlife management

The Terrestrial Quarterly Update joins ARI's long running services:

[ARI seminar series](#): 1hr seminars featuring researchers from ARI and its partners from around the world (also available for free via live webinar).

[ARI eNews](#): ARI's flagship newsletter highlighting new projects, latest scientific publications, new fact sheets and videos, and other notable events.

[Aquatic Quarterly update](#): two updates; one providing detail on current projects, events and publications from ARI's aquatic ecology researchers, the other offering an insight into how research is influencing management.

[ARI website](#): ARI's regularly updated site shares project summaries, publications, fact sheets, guides and videos.

All of ARI's subscriptions are free

www.ari.vic.gov.au/about-us/ari-subscriptions.

VEFN activity report to the 2019 AGM

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. 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.



Attendees at the VEFN AGM

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 dependent 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](#).

Paul Strickland
VEFN Convenor

Cultural walks around Paddock Creek, Gordon

On Sunday 20th October, local Wadawurrung man, Barry Gilson led two walks around the Paddock Creek area around Gordon. Both walks commenced with a talk by Barry at the Gordon Public Hall about the value of local waterways and creeks to the Wadawurrung people. Barry talked about the Paddock Creek area and showed grinding stones, a stone axe head and other objects of cultural significance.

The first walk by about 25 people headed north to Black Hill or Kerrit Bareet as it is known to the Wadawurrung. Black Hill and surrounds holds special significance to the Wadawurrung people and it is easy to see why once you have climbed to the top of the hill.



On top of Kerrit Bareet looking towards Mt Buninyong

The views from the top of the hill are panoramic, from Mt Buninyong with the Lal Lal wind farm in the middle distance and around 360 degrees. Barry talked about the cultural significance of the hill and surrounds to the Wadawurrung and sang to the tapping of sticks.

The afternoon walk was attended by about 15 people and headed east to the Gordon Bushland Reserve, which is adjacent to the Gordon Recreation Reserve and football oval. Paddock Creek runs through the Reserve and Barry pointed out plants that the Wadawurrung use for weaving and yabby holes in the banks of the creek. Friends of Paddock Creek Gordon organised the walks in conjunction with Moorabool Catchment



Kerrit Bareet looking north

Landcare Group. These walks were funded with assistance from the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. Thanks to Brian Carey for allowing access to his property which covers the area around Black Hill.

Friends of Paddock Creek plans to hold more walks during the coming year. Register your interest with Stephen Derick on 0417 326 860 or ecosystems@bigpond.com.



Barry Gilson in Gordon Bushland Reserve