



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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See our web site <https://www.friendsvic.org/> .

Victorian Government continues to stall on VEAC Central West recommendations

The Victorian Government continues to sit on **VEAC recommendations from June 2019 (almost 2 years ago)** for creation of new parks in Victoria's Central West. Frustrated by the continued delays by the Victorian Government an alliance of over 40 groups led by Wombat Forestcare recently wrote an open letter to the Andrews government. The group called on the Andrews government to:

“protect these natural areas of central Victoria, and immediately accept and implement the VEAC Central West Investigation recommendations.”

Over 900 people have added their names to the letter and you can add yours here <https://createnewparks.org.au/> .

As of 4th May, there has been no response from the government to the open letter. Here is the [media release](#) from the group.

In June 2019, VEAC recommended (among other new parks) – after extensive study – the formation of:
a large national park consisting of the existing Lerderderg State Park and the majority of the existing Wombat State Forest (VEAC Final Report on the Central West, June 2019, p74).

The Victorian Government is required to respond to VEAC's recommendations within 6 months, but to date has failed to do so despite repeated calls from a wide range of groups and individuals. Instead the Victorian government has sat on its hands while awarding mineral exploration licences across large tracts of the forests in question and approving logging in sensitive wildlife habitat.

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Best Friend Awards 2021

Nominations for VEFN's 2021 Best Friend Awards have opened. The nomination forms include an additional section to highlight how nominees' contributions to their group may have been impacted by COVID19 and bushfires. This will be the 30th anniversary of the Best Friend Awards with the inaugural award being to Don Marsh in 1991 for his work with Friends of Organ Pipes. To mark this special anniversary, VEFN will be holding the awards in conjunction with Landcare Victoria. Please consider nominating your members for these awards as there are many deserving environmental volunteers.

Nominations are also open for the second year of the Young Best Friend Awards.

Nominations are due by 5pm Wednesday 30th June.

Download nomination forms including the selection criteria for the [Best Friend Awards](#) and [Young Best Friend Awards](#).

Read the report of the 2020 Best Friend Awards in [FriendsNET 112 December 2020](#).

In this edition

- Win for Westernport Bay.
- Victorian Landcare Grants 2021 open.
- World Environment Day 2021 and more.

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.

Win for Westernport Bay

In a decision based on common sense and science the Victorian Government ruled against the establishment of a gas import terminal in Westernport Bay that was proposed by AGL for Crib Point.

Minister for Planning Richard Wynne concluded marine discharges from the proposed AGL and APA project would have unacceptable effects on the environment in Western Port, which is listed as a Ramsar wetland of international significance.

You can read the Reasons for Decision and other documents here

https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/referrals-and-decisions?start_rank=21#Ref-2018-R05-Resources

On 9 April, AGL formally advised the Victorian EPA that it withdrew its Works Approval application. See

<https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/for-community/current-projects-issues/major-infrastructure-and-development/crib-point-gas-import-jetty-and-pipeline-project/crib-point-gas-import-jetty-and-pipeline-project-epas-role> .

“After four years of massive community opposition, we can finally say AGL’s floating gas terminal is dead in the water,” said Environment Victoria Climate and Energy Analyst Rai Miralles. “There is no way for the project to proceed from here.”

Save Westernport spokesperson Jane Carnegie said the community who live around Westernport Bay could finally celebrate. “With relentless community pressure and leaving no stone unturned, we have protected the wetlands against AGL’s inappropriate proposal.

“But this took four years and hundreds of millions of wasted dollars. The state and federal governments must improve permanent protections for Ramsar wetlands and Westernport Bay so this doesn’t happen again.

“The Kawasaki brown coal to hydrogen export facility proposed for Westernport Bay is yet another example of an inappropriate and polluting development. By improving permanent protections for the Bay, the state government could save itself another fight.”

Victorian Landcare Grants 2021 open

The 2021 Victorian Landcare Grants opened for applications recently and \$2.55 million is available for project and support grants. Environmental volunteering and landcare groups and networks are eligible to apply. **Applications close Wednesday 16th June** with applicants expected to be notified of the outcome in August. Project activities must be complete by 30 November 2022.

Two types of grants can be applied for:

Project grants: Up to \$30,000 are available for on-ground works, capacity building activities, community education and engagement that protects, or improves natural assets such as native vegetation, native fauna, waterways, wetlands, and soils.

Support grants

Up to \$500 is available for assistance with costs such as insurance, incorporation and operational needs, or meetings and events or newsletters, websites, and other communication.

Applications must be made through your local Catchment Management Authority. Full details of the grants and links to your CMA can be found here <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/grants/victorian-landcare-grants> .

DELWP Native Vegetation Regulation review & survey

DELWP is seeking input to evaluate the effectiveness and functionality of systems and tools relating to the systems of Native Vegetation Regulation (NVR).

Input is sought through the completion of a short [survey](#) which can be accessed using the link below and will close at 5pm Friday 14th May 2021. All responses are confidential.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=99a96Bj8SE6IVH9UeSciO_cg7bDhXMhKrB_rBUIPOzlUMzRYNTFKWIY5VDBZUVEyVUJHRUJYU1BJRi4u

Please direct any queries to nativevegetation.support@delwp.vic.gov.au

Victorian Government continues to stall on VEAC Central West recommendations (continued)

FriendsNET reported on the applications for mineral exploration licences in [FriendsNET #111 June 2020](#) and found that 5 applications for exploration licences in and around the VEAC study area were accepted by the Victorian Government well after the date of presentation of the VEAC report.



Some of the 200 members of Wombat Forestcare met on the Lederderg River near Blackwood to discuss their hopes for the Wombat Forest to be reclassified as a National Park. Picture © Sandy Scheltema

The increased mineral exploration activity in the area, makes it even more important that the Government acts on the VEAC recommendations and forms the new National Park. VEAC set out its full reasoning as follows:

The recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park covers 49,553 hectares comprised of a large part (29,079 hectares) of the existing Wombat State Forest, the Lerderderg State Park (20,469 hectares) and small areas of in other public land use categories. It contains much of the only largely intact landscape between the Grampians and the eastern highlands, and the only extensive area of very high Strategic Biodiversity Values (SBVs) in the whole investigation area. The recommended park contains large areas of under-represented EVCs (most notably, Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Herb-rich and Shrubby Foothill Forest Complex). It provides high value habitat for many threatened species such as the small sickle greenhood orchid, wombat bossiaea, square tailed kite, powerful owl, brush-tailed phascogale and greater glider, and is the largest block of habitat in western Victoria for species such as the red-browed treecreeper, common wombat and mountain brushtail possum. The headwaters of five of the six major rivers in the existing state forest are included in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park (VEAC 2019, p75).

The Victorian Government has put jobs and economic growth at the forefront of its strategies to respond to the COVID 19 pandemic and catastrophic bushfires of the 2020 summer. As important as that focus is, we have seen the environment taking a backseat. The Victorian [Treasurer’s 2020-21 Budget speech](#) delivered on 24 November 2020 made not one mention of environmental matters. This is somewhat ironic given the destruction resulting from the bushfires. It is to be hoped that the 2021-22 Budget to be delivered on 20 May 2021 will bring a little more balance into the composition of “economic” growth.

Birdlife Australia saves habitat in East Gippsland for Glossy Black Cockatoo

This inspirational story about the efforts of Birdlife Australia to save important areas of Black Sheoak in East Gippsland first caught my attention with a report in [The Age](#) in April. Inspirational because of the efforts of the group and individuals, but worrisome because it amplifies how Victorian Government agencies seems to operate to different agendas.

Below is the story from Birdlife Australia which you can find here <https://birdlife.org.au/media/birdlife-saves-cocky-habitat/>,

‘Standing together to stop extinctions’ is our motto, and last week, it was put into practice (not for the first time) when BirdLife Australia was able to intervene to prevent planned burns in habitat in East Gippsland that had survived the 2019–20 Black Summer Bushfires. The Black Sheoak woodland habitat is vital for the survival of the Vulnerable local population of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo, and is susceptible to fire.



Photos of Glossy Black Cokatoo courtesy Birdlife Australia <https://www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/glossy-black-cockatoo>

The local population of the black-cockatoos had already been devastated by the bushfires, with many killed and survivors forced to fly across the landscape in a desperate search for suitable sheoak habitat to forage and breed in.

To alleviate this, BirdLife Australia has initiated a project to provide artificial nest hollows for the birds to breed in the scattered, remnant patches of unburnt habitat. It is funded by the Federal Government’s Bushfire Recovery Project.

However, these patches of Black Sheoak forest were the target of planned burns conducted by Forest Fire

Management Victoria — an agency within the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. One site of the proposed burns is located just 500 metres from where Birdlife Australia has already installed nest boxes specifically for the cockatoos, which is classified as Vulnerable in Victoria.

Although the burns were planned, and the FFMV is supposed to assess prospective burn sites for threatened species, BirdLife Australia only discovered their intention to burn the habitat at two sites — Wombat Track and Tostaree, both east of Orbost — ‘at the 11th hour’.

Despite the short notice, Dr Jenny Lau, BirdLife Australia’s Preventing Extinctions Program Manager, and Deb Sullivan, who is overseeing BirdLife Australia’s Glossy Black-Cockatoo Breeding Project, were able to persuade the FFMV to have some areas excluded from the burns after BirdLife Australia had worked frantically to map the areas of Black Sheoak within the boundary of the Wombat Track burn. About 50 hectares of crucial habitat was saved from the burn after BirdLife Australia’s intervention.

“It’s clear that [Forest Fire Management Victoria] is not doing enough to identify and protect important habitat for species most impacted by the 2019–20 fires,” Dr Lau told *The Age*.

“On the one hand, the Victorian Government is providing support to communities to revegetate areas with sheoaks... but on the other, [Forest Fire Management Victoria] has burnt sheoak in areas unlikely to reduce risk to life and property but likely to have real consequences for threatened Glossy Black-Cockatoos.” The biggest ongoing threat to the black-cookies in East Gippsland is starvation after the burning of their Black Sheoak woodlands.

Forest Fire Management Victoria claims that biodiversity specialists assessed planned burn areas, and they had excluded known feeding areas for the Glossy Black-Cockatoo.

Over the next three years, Forest Fire Management Victoria plans to burn 133 sites across Gippsland, blackening a total of nearly 63,000 hectares.

[World Environment Day](#) on 5th June 2021 will focus on restoration of environment over the next decade.

“The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is a rallying call for the protection and revival of ecosystems all around the world, for the benefit of people and nature. It aims to halt the degradation of ecosystems, and restore them to achieve global goals. Only with healthy ecosystems can we enhance people’s livelihoods, counteract climate change, and stop the collapse of biodiversity.”

For more information see

<https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/about-un-decade> .

Looking at the need for restoration of environment in Australia, a group of scientists examined the state of ecosystems in 19 important habitats. Their findings that many ecosystems are near a state of collapse are cause for great concern.

The study assessed degradation of coral reefs, arid deserts, tropical savanna, mangrove forests, wet tropical rainforest, western central arid zones, Georgina Gidgee woodlands, Ningaloo Reef’ Shark Bay seagrass beds, Murray-Darling Basin waterways, Riverine areas in the Murray-Darling basin, Sub-alpine forests, Great Southern reef kelp forests, Mediterranean forests and woodlands, Monaro Tablelands, Snow patch herb fields, Mountain Ash forests, Gondwanan forests, Subantarctic tundra and Antarctic desert.

The authors of the study comment that:

Our analysis clearly demonstrates the widespread and rapid collapse, and in some cases the irreversible transition rather than gradual change at a regional scale.

And “patches of Mountain ash forest may require a century or longer to recover to old-growth status. In comparison, recovery of populations of some mammal or bird species may occur within 10–20 years if suitable habitat were to be generated and maintained (e.g. through the provision of appropriately designed, placed and managed nest boxes...”

The listing of the precarious states of these ecosystems goes on and on in a similar vein. Many of the problems can be fixed by concerted efforts if enough people care. The authors published an article about their study in Global Biology and the full text can be read here <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gcb.15539> . Adam Morton wrote a good piece about the study for The Guardian here <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/26/australian-scientists-warn-urgent-action-needed-to-save-19-collapsing-ecosystems> .

Loose ends – the downside of green energy

Perhaps this is slightly off-topic for Friends and other environmental volunteering groups, but I have become increasingly concerned about the promoters of green energy and technologies, most particularly electric vehicles.

Investment in improving our physical environment in Victoria is much needed but the Victorian Government refuses to act on the recommendations of its own advisory body to create new parks. How then does it make sense for the Victorian Government to pour \$100m into subsidies for electric vehicles? Reducing reliance on fossil fuels is good, but what are the consequences and what are the alternatives?

On 1st May, Lily D’Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change gave us her version of the justification when she announced the \$100m program. In her [Media Release](#) she claims that the \$3,000 subsidy for purchase of an electric vehicle is “a part of our comprehensive plan to meet our target of net zero emissions by 2050 and support new jobs.” The subsidy will be made available for at least 20,000 electric vehicles meaning that at least \$60 million of the package is to encourage people to buy new electric cars.

The principal justification is that electric vehicles are “Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEVs). It is disappointing to see the term ZEV being used. Electric vehicles just like any other vehicle are manufactured using a mix of metals, plastics and other materials all of which must be mined and processed before they can be used in manufacture. Every manufactured product results in emissions. Whether vehicles are fuelled by renewable energy or fossil fuels they still use energy and materials. And electric vehicles use large quantities of rare earths and metals to make the electric motors and batteries. Electric vehicles are more appropriately called Zero Tailpipe Emission Vehicles (ZTEVs).

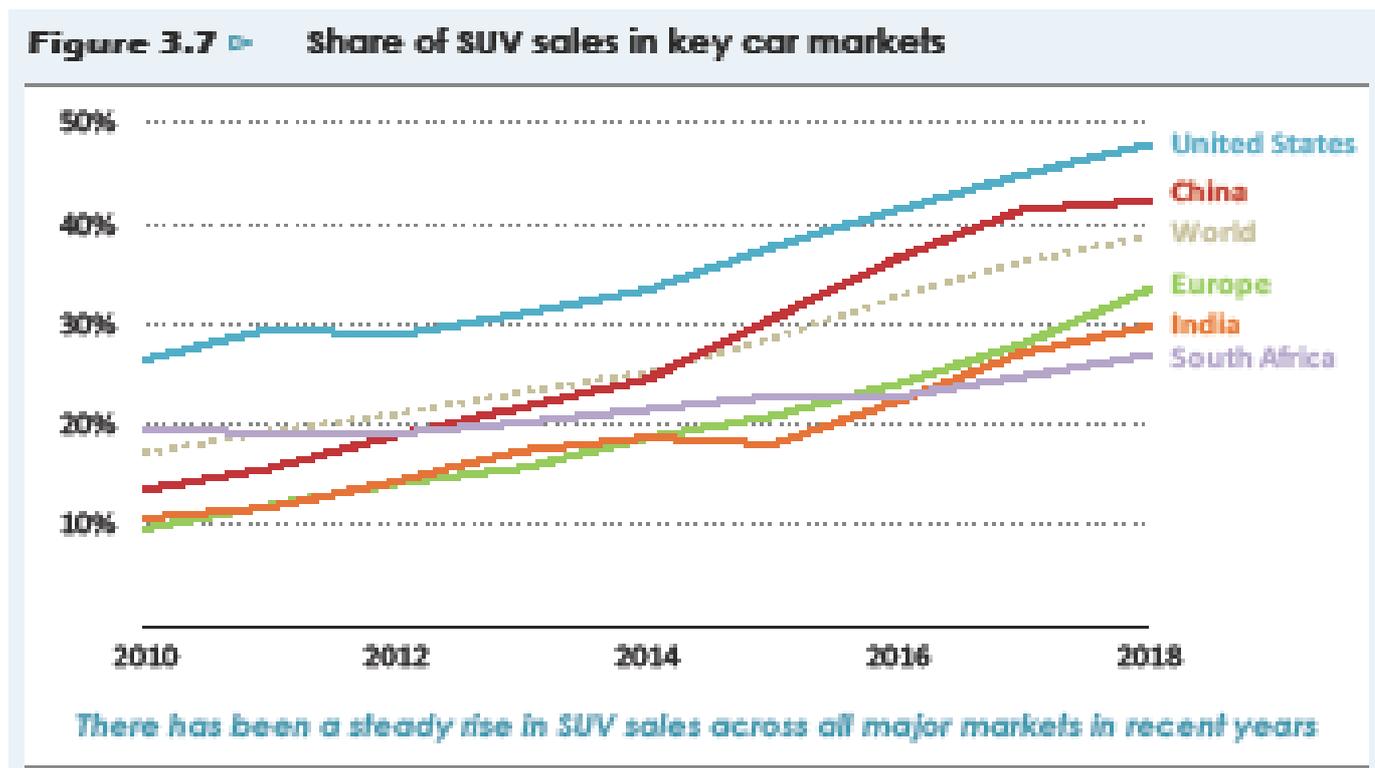
Electric vehicles may well improve air quality in Greater Melbourne and may also contribute to lower net emissions in Victoria. The main reason for this is these vehicles are not manufactured here and Victoria does not produce much in the way of materials that are used in their manufacture. So this is a classic emissions shifting exercise – where the emissions will be generated in the countries where the vehicles are manufactured and the materials mined and processed.

Al Jazeera has produced a video titled “The Dark Side of Green Energy” which is a good primer that explains these issues. See

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/featured-documentaries/2020/9/7/the-dark-side-of-green-energy> .

Misrepresentations about green energy and technologies are only a part of the problem though. Passenger vehicles keep getting larger and larger and the appetite for large SUV’s seems to be accelerating. As the international Energy Agency has reported, sales of SUVs have soared (see the IEA chart below):

This dramatic shift towards bigger and heavier cars has led to a doubling of the share of SUVs over the last decade. As a result, there are now over 200 million SUVs around the world, up from about 35 million in 2010, accounting for 60% of the increase in the global car fleet since 2010. Around 40% of annual car sales today are SUVs, compared with less than 20% a decade ago. <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/growing-preference-for-suvs-challenges-emissions-reductions-in-passenger-car-market> .



SUVs are large and relatively heavy and are less fuel efficient than smaller vehicles. And of course, manufacturers are producing electric powered versions to satisfy consumer demand for “green” vehicles. Two new models from well-known brands weigh over 2.4 tonnes, twice the weight of small four cylinder vehicles. Whether they are ZTEVs or not may not matter when the much larger quantity of materials used is accounted for. Let alone their greater impact on roads.

How is this relevant to Friends and environmental volunteer groups? Two things:

1. We are all part of this and probably most of us own or use passenger vehicles, utilities or even trucks. We all want to minimise our adverse impacts on the physical environment so we need to make ourselves aware of how best to do that. As always with matters environmental there are lots of angles to consider.
2. Is support for electric vehicles the best use for \$100 million of taxpayer dollars? I for one can think of many environment improvement projects that would provide greater benefits, more jobs and contribute more to emissions reduction. Number one on my list is a massive program of re-establishing native vegetation cover statewide. And I don’t just mean planting – ongoing care and maintenance is essential.

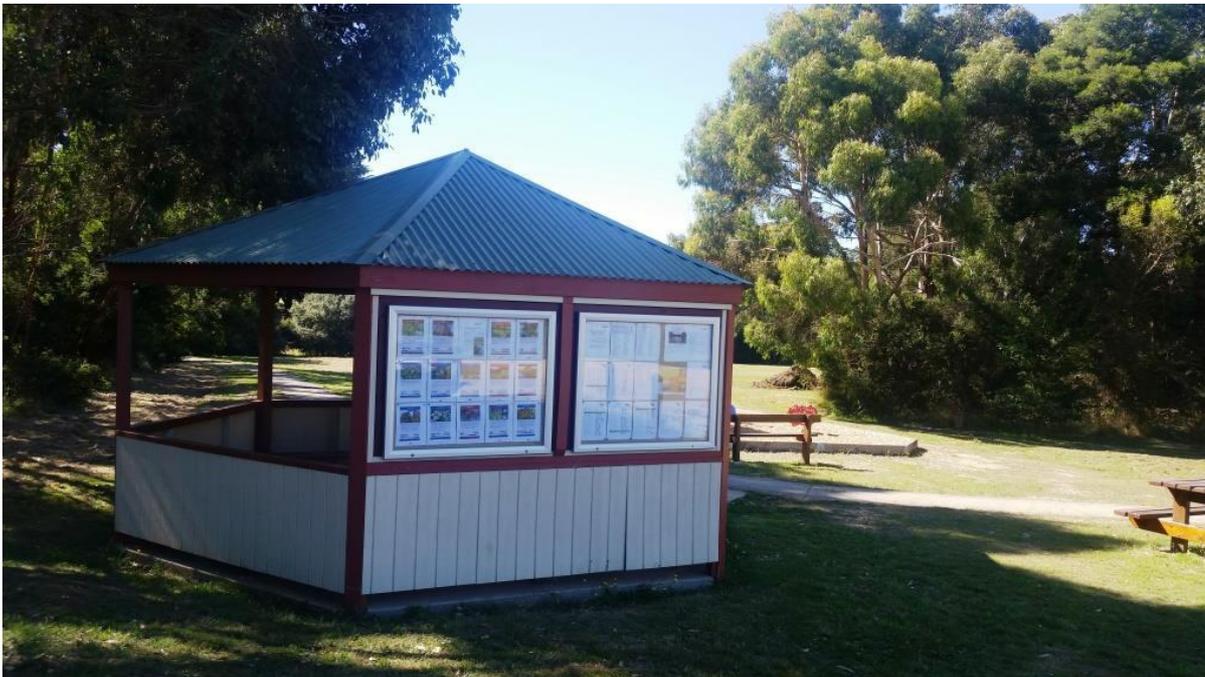
Friends of Paddock Creek Gordon invests in new facilities in the Reserve

This piece is an example of how a small Friends group achieved improvements on their patch of land during the pandemic. We haven't experienced bushfires in this area (yet), but the pandemic made most people wary of getting out and doing things, including Council officers and government agencies. However, through careful scheduling of tasks and attendance, the group got on and undertook some significant works while ensuring physical distancing and appropriate hygiene measures.

I know that many other groups have likewise got on with things during these difficult times. If groups have examples and stories about how they worked through the pandemic or bushfires or both, please send them in for publication.

Friends of Paddock Creek (FoPC) has been busy with further developments in the Reserve and has installed notice cases at the Rotunda and created a new seating area. FoPC had earlier removed a stand of Hawthorn trees and established new native plantings near the dam and creek at Lyndhurst Street. This project has been funded through a Victorian Landcare Grant in conjunction with Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group (MCLG). Moorabool Shire Council (MSC) separately funded half of the cost of the notice cases.

The acquisition of the notice cases took considerable time as they were sourced from Europe. They were installed in early 2021 as shown in the picture below. The current displays feature information about common woody and other weeds found in the Reserve; what native plants to select in the area and other information about the project and FoPC.



The notice cases are made of aluminium with weatherproof, lockable fronts with safety glass. The Rotunda is in a readily accessible position in the Reserve, adjacent to the playground and seating areas. The involvement of an additional funding by MSC has led to a better outcome for this component of the project than had been planned. Because of funding constraints only one table with benches has been acquired at this stage. The new seating area and installation was completed recently and is shown in the picture below.



The new seating area faces north east and receives morning sun and is sheltered from the afternoon sun by a stand of eucalypts. The area has full view of the adjacent playground. A second table has now been ordered and it is hoped to install this in late May or early June. Additional mulch will be provided to fill the area.

These projects have involved many hours of volunteer time – planning; acquiring equipment and materials and installation and FoPC thanks the volunteers who have made these new facilities possible.

FoPC's priorities for new facilities in the Reserve are: rubbish bins near the playground; a water fountain and toilets.

If you would like to know more about this project or Friends of Paddock Creek contact Stephen Derrick at ecosystems@bigpond.com or on 0417 326 860.

Please send stories about the work of your groups.