



Latrobe Catchment
Landcare
Network

Annual Report 2021



Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network

Chair Report 2021

This last year has been an interesting one from many viewpoints. Covid restrictions have had a major impact in many aspects of life, least of all in Landcare which is such a social calling. Face-to-face activities have been postponed or cancelled or turned into virtual phone/internet hook ups. But they are not the same. As I write we are in our 6th lockdown despite Gippsland (Bass Coast excepted) being covid free in 2021.

To complicate matters further Marnie Ellis moved on from Landcare Facilitation to Regional Landcare Program Officer WGCMA in December. John Crosby retired as Network Co-ordinator in January after years in that role. I thank them both for their diligent approach to their respective roles with LCLN.

In recent years the government have been trying to revamp the management of Landcare Facilitators in Victoria. What was to occur in July 2020 is close to occurring in July 2021 with two six-month extensions to the previous funding arrangements. So, in February we were faced with advertising for two part time positions to finish in June (four months). We elected to combine the roles and advertise the position for six months, assuming further delays in process (which did occur). I thank Michael Slot for his efforts over this short and difficult time. With limited understanding of the Landcare system, he has learnt much and contributed successfully to our ongoing role in the community. He has introduced many new ideas and broadened our network

of relationships. I wish him well for his future and am sure he will remain involved with Landcare.

All Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program positions across the state were opened to be re-allocated to where the apparent need was identified, be it with Landcare or some other organisation that met the requirements. In our area two positions were secured, one covering Latrobe, the other west Gippsland. The process was time consuming and rather excessive for a voluntary organisation, not in sync with the original ethos of Landcare. We agreed that we would continue, for now, our association with WGCMA regarding the hosting of the positions and thank them sincerely for their contributions and efforts with the employment process.

Part of the rationale for the changes to the Landcare facilitator process was to ensure that Landcare Facilitators appointed are properly remunerated and supported by the hosting organisation. We meet all the employment requirements by working with and through WGCMA, but the funds allocated by government for Landcare Facilitators are insufficient to meet these costs. So additional employment funds need to be sourced through the management of projects, which, in covid times are scarce. The Victorian Landcare Grants for 2020 were cancelled. We need to continually monitor options for the future to meet or reduce employment costs.

In February we welcomed Nathan Misiurka, an independent Landcare member, to the board. With a solid NRM background and loads of energy he has sparked up our meetings and assisted in focusing our vision. The balance of our board has been stable for some years and this coming year will be one of renewal. Margaret and Eric Smith will not stand for re-election this year. They will be sadly missed. Their contribution to the functioning of the board as minute secretary and ensuring processes ran smoothly through ongoing employment and covid related issues has been wonderful. With Springsure Hill LG going from strength to strength they will focus their attention there.

I thank the other members of the board; Phil Darton as Treasurer, Ian Hill and Darryl Marks who both stand for re-election tonight, as well as Alison Craven and Caroline Doolan who with me have another year to run. Nathan Misiurka was appointed to the board as a casual vacancy and his position needs to be confirmed tonight.

I ask all groups to discuss who they might encourage to join the board. Remember, without a functioning board we will lose our staff and support for the groups we assist.

In recent times we have completed the advertising process, interviewed and appointed our new staff. Marnie Ellis returns, this time as Landcare Facilitator Network Coordinator, facilitating the Latrobe Landcare groups and Kelsey Tong facilitating the west Gippsland Landcare groups. I welcome them both formally tonight. Please use the opportunity tonight to say G'day. We believe it to be a great mix of experience, understanding and enthusiasm and equips us well for the

2021 – 2024 period. There are some wonderful opportunities for LCLN to be involved: The Lake Narracan wetland development, the Strzelecki Alpine Biolinks Group which includes the rehabilitation of the closing coal mine and a Greater Glider research project, initially based in native forest near Boolarra.

On another level the board has been concerned at the continued tightening of management control and reporting requirements for Landcare Facilitators by the government through DELWP. Land care was based on being a community driven organisation. The reporting mechanisms and complexities reduce the time Landcare Facilitators can support the groups for which they were employed, and to develop significant project direction and concepts. In addition, recent changes to selection criteria for Victorian Landcare Grants have taken decision making away from the local community. We see these changes, together with insufficient funding creating bureaucratic diversions to what we are here for: Caring for the Land.

With the coming year I believe we can look forward to developing the new post covid normal (if allowed), more face-to-face activities, stimulating vision and broader networks.

**Peter Devonshire Chair. LCLN
September 2021**

Treasurer's Report for the year ended 30 June 2021

This report is presented in conjunction with the audited 2020/2021 Financial Statements. (Auditors Report and Financial Statements attached separately)

The Opening Balance at 1 July 2020: \$222,499.20

The Closing Balance at 30 June 2021: \$223,541.56

The Network Board and staff worked very hard to match expenditure to income in a year when COVID-19 limited the opportunity to initiate new projects to grow its income.

The small positive change to the balance sheet was a significant turnaround from previous years and sets a base for the Network to confidently go forward with its work to improve the natural environment in the Latrobe Catchment.

With Facilitator funding obtained for two positions in 2020/2021, after the uncertainty of that funding through 2020, the Network looks forward to a stable employment situation to do its work.

I would like to thank Kerry Shearer from the WGCMA for her support managing the Network's finances. I also thank Belinda Brennan and Sam Shannon for their support particularly in the area of managing the employment funding. Our Facilitators at various stages through the year, John Crosby, Michael Slot and Marnie Ellis were a great support and, as always, very patient.

Phil Darton,

Treasurer, LCLN

Group Reports

Cowwarr Landcare Group

The Cowwarr Landcare Group continues to maintain the Swing Bridge Reserve at Cowwarr Weir. We lost the battle with the Spring grass; it took weeks of working bees and loss of several seedlings before some semblance of control was restored. Some weed-spraying dealt with fat hen and other summer weeds, especially in the 'swamp' area partially planted last year.

The Fulham works crew resumed visits in February 2021 and the grass stayed under control. We had advanced warning of restricted access because Southern Rural Water planned to drain Cowwarr Weir pool. Fulham crew made an extra visit in May for maintenance work. The Landcare Group continued their clean up burning 6 rubbish piles after fire restrictions lifted.

Winter Planting in cooperation with Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network and the Gippsland Plains Rail Trail saw 4000 tube-stock planted successfully (in between lockdowns) with the Glengarry Primary School and Cowwarr Primary School on the East side of Rail Trail North of Rainbow Creek at Cowwarr.

The Toongabbie Primary School worked on extending a planting at the Toongabbie Fire Station. (photo below)



The Cowwarr Primary School have worked to keep their greenhouse and garden beds operational during extended lockdown periods.

In some fund raising efforts members of the Cowwarr Landcare Group ran a fruit and vegetable -stall at Silly Galah which is a small coffee van located in the main street. Over a number of weeks \$140 was made for the Landcare Group selling Nashi and figs while \$40 was donated to the Primary School through the sale of Lettuce a feijoa.

Glengarry Landcare Group

The Glengarry Landcare Group has held a few small working bees and some face to face meetings this year. We acknowledge that it has been a challenging year but we are excited that volunteers have maintained their volunteering spirit and are very much looking forward to some 'normal' gatherings when we can.

The Glengarry Landcare Group have started to work with the Gippsland Plains Rail Trail Committee and take care of an area North of Eaglehawk Creek between Glengarry and Toongabbie. The area has been extensively planted since 2017 with the generous help of local school groups and volunteers. The Landcare Group is now maintaining this section of trees, ensuring they are relatively free of weeds and replacing any trees if required.



In March we held a very successful community Clean Up Australia Day followed by a BBQ lunch. Amazing what 15 people can achieve in a small space in 1.5 hours.

On National Tree Day we had planned for a community planting however Covid restrictions put an end to that so 10 members of the Landcare group undertook the planting and mulching activity. We hope in 2022 to hold a large community day around National Tree Day involving planting, maintenance and rubbish removal along the rail trail.



In 2020, the Landcare Group introduced "Learning with Landcare" where a guest speaker is invited to present at group meetings. Topics have been wide and varied but to date have included twitching, Bee keeping and Biodynamics just to name a few. This has been a great way of engaging new members of the community in Landcare.

Springsure Hill Landcare Group

The Springsure Hill Landcare Group has tapped into the knowledge and experience of members at meetings and farm visits to learn more about different subjects. Topics have included carbon sequestration, local birdlife and revegetation projects.

The ongoing Covid-19 situation has resulted in fewer meetings and field days. We have been unable to hold social events or working bees. We were unsuccessful in two grant applications despite investing significant amounts of time and energy.

It was fantastic to welcome new families at our new members afternoon in February. We expanded the size of our Committee to engage a larger number of members. Our membership grew from 25 households with 10 new households signing on. Our newsletter published 3 times a year continues to be distributed to 250 household around the area.

With a growing membership and an expanded committee structure, we look forward to engaging a broader group of Landcarers. Our group's 25th anniversary in 2022 provides an opportunity to acknowledge our local Landcare pioneers and build momentum for the next phase of the group.

We are adopting a strategic navigation approach to focus our energies and guide decision making.



Springsure Hill boundary revegetation on a member's property inspected at a field day in 2021, planted by direct seeding 2017

Friends of Land and Water Landcare Group

Our Landcare group has 35 members though only 13 or 14 of those are physically strong and active enough to do the LANDCARE work.

The highlight has been our ability to keep the work going, despite COVID-19 restrictions, some technical and administrative problems with machinery, and the effects of fatigue/age/sickness affecting some of the relatively small number of workers.

We have one interesting new planting project, but basically it has mostly been routine maintenance work.



Given the physical and age-related limitations of our group-members, continuing with maintenance activities is a challenge.

Note: The Friends of Land and Water Landcare Group is a bunch of not-so-young people who live in the Lifestyle Village in Warragul, and have taken on some environmental challenges in their local surroundings: cleaning up and partly replanting several acres of land outside their back fence; and stabilising and beautifying the banks of a little creek that runs through the Village.

Mt Worth Landcare

Our Landcare group has 29 members, this year has been challenging however we have had a number of highlights throughout the year. Our main highlights include;

- The maintenance of the sponsorship of the 15 Trees group through which they have allowed 5-6 of our members to plant 4000 tube stock in 2020 and further 2000 this winter.
- The successful application for a roadside environmental weed control grant (\$5,000) through the Baw Baw Shire. This enabled some 3 km of road frontage to be sprayed to control weeds such as ivy, hawthorn, holly, periwinkle etc
- Our weed subcommittee as well as some members of our neighbouring Triholm Landcare group have managed to get a pilot program established focusing on ragwort, blackberry and thistle control in a targeted area. Working with DEDJTR they have identified an area of some 20 properties which Agriculture Victoria staff have targeted to assist landholders with the control of these weeds.
- The fostering of strong connections with the staff and pupils at Warragul Specialist School. The students have assisted in maintenance around the Seaview Hall, Seaview school, Tetoora Road Hall as well as on a couple of members properties.

Our biggest challenge has been the maintenance of togetherness within our community. Due to the Covid pandemic we have had only one community get together in the last 18 months. Even planting days have been restricted to individuals and close family members. Our group needs an activity to re-energise the group.



Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare Group

In 2020-21 Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare Group had 26 members from 15 households. Some are volunteer or new members who don't pay membership subscriptions. The rest are financial.

These things happened in the 2020-21 financial year:

- We completed our funded riparian re-vegetation project in Upper Middle Creek in September 2020.
- Then we saw much of it washed away in floods in June 2021 (we have since been re-planting)
- We experienced the June 2021 storms that also closed roads, took the roof window out of our greenhouse, cut off local power supplies and caused landslips. They prevented access to the greenhouse, some of our planting sites and members homes.
- We applied for and got a Gallagher Electric Fencing Grant for a browser exclusion fence on our Billy's Creek re-veg / wildlife corridor block at Jeeralang.
- We don't yet (Sept 2021) know the outcome of a Vic. Landcare Grant submission for fencing and riparian revegetation on Morwell River and Bellbrook Creek that we applied for in May 2021. We were unable to apply for group maintenance because we submitted for a grant and so have had to be self-funded for the last two years.



- Somehow we dodged COVID lockdowns and managed to get planting parties in and weed control done at our three main re-veg sites.

- Even our members who live in Melbourne managed to get down here to do some work on their properties, albeit not as much or as often as they would have liked.
- Over summer we collected more seed than ever before to direct seed the west end of our Billy's Creek site.
- A small community grant from the Delburn Wind Farm allowed us to buy two sets of proper seed cleaning sieves and to commission a report to give us indicative seed quantities and a collection schedule for Billy's Creek.
- In August 2020 we were buoyed by the discovery that our direct seeding test site in Morwell National Park had produced good results after 12 months and there were new canopy trees growing.
- We had another go at the Sycamore Maples in Budgeree Bushland

Narracan Landcare Group

The last years group efforts have been hampered by COVID 19 causing the cancellation of all meetings. Unfortunately due to the geographic nature of our region, meeting online was not an option as reception is extremely poor.

Below is a list of activities that have been undertaken by the Narracan landcare Group over the past few years:

1. 3 lots of tree planting (school x 2, Shelter belt improvement x 1)
2. Bird Talk by local expert David Mules
3. Bee keeping Presentation by Bill Ringin
4. Burrowing Narracan Crayfish
5. Discussions around the state of Narracan Creek
6. Weed infestation- Talk by Baw Baw Shire weed control overseer
7. Guest Speaker re Platypus Geoff Williams, Past Director of Healesville Sanctuary

After hearing from Geoff Williams, the group applied for funding to carry out scientific study regarding the presence of Platypus in the Narracan Creek. Group members collected samples and after analysis there were found to be platypus in the creek which is a great result.

Boolarra South Landcare Group

Like other groups Covid has disrupted normal Landcare activities for some time.

The Boolarra South area was hit with significant wind and flood damage after a huge storm in June. Fallen trees and flooding affected much of the community. The Mill site requires remediation and DELWP have begun work to deal with that.



Access to The Falls has been closed so water testing was done at Apex Park instead. It is interesting to note that the water quality was not affected despite the high water flows and amount of debris.

Pictures shows heavily impacted areas around the township

Spring is here and the birds have been very active. A few snakes have been spotted too.



The Boolarra South Landcare Group continues to plan for monthly working bees on the second Saturday of each month from 10am – 12 noon. These working bees will continue provided we are not under any lockdown restrictions.

Tanjil Valley Landcare Group

Tanji Valley currently has 24 members. The support we have received from the local community/non Landcare members for the maintenance of the Blue Rock Lake walking track has been very welcome. Maintaining the track is a big job and the extra support from the community has been very important to the group. Earlier in the year when there were no Covid restrictions we had two very good farm visits at the property of two group members. Our biggest challenges have been trying to schedule events during covid restrictions. Meetings have been cancelled and rescheduled and cancelled again. Flooding on the track was a big challenge this year but didn't remove too much of our hard work.

Expanding our membership through the continuation of our work on our pet project the Blue Rock Lake walking track and through community events such as National Tree Day and Clean-up Australia Day. There's also a good opportunity to help educate the community on a range of environmental issues such as energy storage systems and reducing the use of plastics. A win is that an increased social media presence is helping to attract new members albeit slowly.



Neerim and District Landcare Group

The Neerim and District Landcare Group has 29 members.

Wildlife in Tarago farm waterways – a citizen science program

In March, Neerim District Landcare Group in partnership with Jindivick Landcare Group and EnviroDNA, found a COVID window to hold the final information session for this project, for which the sampling had been carried out in 20/21. At least 49 vertebrate species were identified, including 4 frogs, 25 birds, 13 mammals, 5 fish and 2 reptiles. The decapods assay identified at least 6 species. Different species mixes were identified at each site. There are opportunities for further study to build on this project and the earlier Farm Dams citizen science project.

Tarago Catchment Healthy farms project

NDLG continues its important ongoing work, funded by Melbourne Water, with landholders in the Tarago Reservoir Catchment to improve water quality through land management practices such as stream protection with fencing and revegetation. While curtailed somewhat by the COVID restrictions, significant on ground works and maintenance have been carried out on 7 properties in the Tarago Reservoir catchment including specific weed control and infill planting.

The biggest challenge this year has, of course, been COVID. The Group held a Strategic Planning session early in the year where it confirmed the ongoing importance of tree planting and stream habitat restoration on key waterways in the area. However, COVID restrictions have severely hampered the group's ability to progress this work. The Group had also worked with the Neerim South Primary School to build a frog habitat and native garden in the school grounds. This work will continue as restrictions allow.

There are a number of exciting possibilities ahead. There is interest in the community to sustain and increase wildlife habitat around the peri-urban fringes of Neerim South as housing development expands. There is still more stream protection and restoration work needed on Red Hill Creek. Another significant waterway, Scalp Creek, needs protection and there are opportunities around the Tarago Reservoir with renewed community interest in opening up the Reservoir Park for passive recreation. Of course, the ongoing Tarago Healthy Farms project provides opportunities for community engagement in innovative projects such as the eDNA citizen science projects of recent years.