

# Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network

## 2020 Annual Report



### **Coordinators Report**

First of all, I must acknowledge the Board of the LCLN who have been extremely supportive of Marnie and I and can be relied upon whenever there's a need. Board members are Margaret Smith, Alison Craven, Caroline Doolan, Eric Smith, Daryl Marks, Ian Hill, Treasurer Phil Darton and President Peter Devonshire. THANK YOU

Secondly, I must also acknowledge what an excellent organisation the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is as our host organisation. Marnie and I want for nothing! The training and support the CMA provides for Landcare is a ten out of ten. A big thank you to Belinda Brennan, Kathleen Brack and Sam Shannon who provide the bulk of that support.

Thirdly, I have been lucky to have had Marnie as a work colleague for the past three years. Her work ethic is enormous, and she always finds the time to fit things in. As you read through her report below you can get a sense of her capabilities and the breadth of the work she has accomplished as she balances Landcare commitments, family and her many varied interests.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the good work that's been done by Landcare Groups and individuals across West Gippsland. Whether it be controlling weeds, planting trees, preserving remnants or farming sustainably your work is making our region a better place to live in or visit.

As the old saying goes 'there's never a dull moment....' and that certainly applies to Landcare over the past 12 months. Usually its seasonal factors that upset our plans i.e. too hot, too wet or even too windy but this year it was COVID and didn't that throw a huge spanner in the works. But fortunately I.T came to the fore and now everyone can 'Zoom' or 'Go To' or even 'Teams' and participate in webinars and meetings on-line. It's been a revelation.

**Below is a summary of what Marnie and I have been applying ourselves to throughout 2019/2020**

#### **Landcare Display Trailer**

The Landcare Display Trailer continues to be a feature at local markets. Over the summer months the van is regularly taken to the Hill End and the Rokeby markets. The trailer is full of a huge range of environmental information and is quite a popular feature wherever it is taken. Nesting boxes and Myna Bird traps are also on sale. 'Willow' the Powerful Owl is the main attraction and draws many people to the van.



#### **Projects**

Currently LCLN has 8 on-ground projects happening on private land which have been funded through a range of sources including AGL, the Victorian Government and the Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee. These 8 projects together have put 10,600 plants in the ground, built 8.4 kilometres of fencing and protected 29.4 hectares of plantings and remnant bush.

Our greatest sponsor over the years has been Energy Australia who this year provided the network with funding to initiate a feasibility study into completing some restoration works at Lake Narracan. LCLN are hoping that in the coming years the western end of Lake Narracan and the lower reaches of the Tanjil and Latrobe Rivers can be turned into a wetland (**Read more about this in Marnie's report**)

Energy Australia also provides funding for the National Tree Day events. This is a highlight of the year for LCLN as it involves the schools. In 2019 10,000 plants were planted through Energy Australia's support. In total LCLN coordinated the planting of 20,600 plants during 2019/2020

### **Biodiversity Response Program – Invertebrates Project**

This is a three year project sponsored by DELWP and revolves around identifying colonies of the Giant Gippsland Earthworm and three species of endemic threatened species of burrowing crayfish – the Narracan Burrowing Cray, Strzelecki Burrowing Cray and the Warragul Burrowing Cray. COVID has hit this project hard and virtually cancelled out 2020. What's really exciting about this project is the use of DNA to identify the crayfish species.



**Narracan Burrowing Crayfish**

### **Facilitator Report - November 2020**

Despite the challenges thrown at us all in the second half of 19/20, LCLN has continued to deliver Landcare messaging, good news stories and training events (albeit in a different format) to our Landcare members.

I personally very much look forward to getting back out in the field and getting my hands dirty as we move into 2021.

Marnie 😊

### **National Tree Day funded by Energy Australia**

Our partnership with Energy Australia is very strong and they continue to be great supporters of landcare and community events in LCLN.

National Tree Day events that took place in July, August and September 2019 were bigger than ever for LCLN with many months of planning and planting taking place across the Network.

10,000 trees were planted by 800 volunteers across 20 different planting sites and participation by schools increased by 40% on the previous year.

We gained some great media coverage as a result of these events which led to some new families joining LCLN as independent members and some school enquiries for the 2020 National Tree Day events.



### **Restoration of Lake Narracan Feasibility Study**

In 2019, Marnie was fortunate to take part in a 10 month long mentoring program known as Waterway Management Twinning Program.

Coming into the initial Twinning Workshop, Marnie had an idea to pull together a feasibility study for the Restoration of the Lake Narracan Wetland area. With input from her mentor Rhonda and other Twinning participants, it became evident quite quickly that this was a huge task, and one that required a significant amount of time and expertise.

After a few weeks of navigating this space it was agreed upon to 'start a discussion' around the Lake Narracan wetland area and find out a little more about the history, adjoining landholders, changes over time, and exactly which agencies may be interested in learning more, and potentially joining the effort to restore part of Lake Narracan.

Through participating in the Twinning Program, Marnie aimed to develop her skills in project proposal writing as well as building local industry networks.

Early this year Energy Australia agreed to fund a feasibility study looking at the restoration of the Lake Narracan Wetland area and a contractor has been engaged to undertake this work.

The aim of the feasibility study is to:

- Establish the baseline condition and extent of wetland dependant ecosystems including compiling a list of native and exotic species
- Identify and consult with relevant stakeholders
- Identify and document in consultation with stakeholders the social and cultural values of the Lake Narracan Wetland.
- Facilitate workshop with stakeholders / community to discuss priorities with regard to the site.
- Identify and prioritise possible restoration activities suitable to the lake Narracan wetland area which includes consideration to cost and environmental and social benefits.

It is envisaged that the feasibility will assist the network to understand the possibilities for any restoration works and also stakeholder and community interest in any such project.



Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) have expressed interest in being involved further if there is scope to extend into a project phase after the feasibility has been completed. Initial information from the feasibility report will be available to the Network in March 2021.

You can read more about Twinning Program here.

<https://www.twinningiswinning.com.au/>

### Landcare Training – February 2020

With funding from Victorian State Government, staff from West Gippsland and East Gippsland took part in the 2 days training along with the Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitators (RALF) and Regional Landcare Coordinators (RLC) from each region.



This was a great way for facilitators to meet other Landcare staff from bordering networks and to also learn about current and future projects in the broader Gippsland area.

Each network took the opportunity to present on a topic of choice and this proved a valuable insight into the similarities and differences across the regions.

Topics included mental health, self care, EOI databases, role of urban Landcare and an insight into East Gippsland's wild dog program to name

a few.

A stand out for the 2 days was a presentation and chat with West Gippsland adventurer Beau Miles. Beau gave a great insight into what drives him in his daily pursuits and his adventurous spirit was really fascinating.

In addition to the above mentioned topics, there was many discussions about how West Gippsland landcare could assist after the devastating summer bushfires.

Bringing the 2 areas together has allowed staff from East & West Gippsland Landcare networks to continue catching up and look for opportunities to work together on projects in the future.



### **Social media updates**

The Network webpage [www.lcln.com.au](http://www.lcln.com.au) continues to be updated as new material and resources come to hand.

There has been a small increase in Facebook followers to the Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network in the past 12 month period. This is due to an increased number of posts and information sharing and the move to more people accessing information online from March this year.

### **E-News**

Our monthly E-News is being sent to over 364 subscribers and is a great way to bring the most up to date Landcare Network information directly to the subscribers inbox.

### **Gippsland Sustainable Agriculture Network (GSAN)**

Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network has been attending GSAN meetings in the past 12 months, with the aim of learning what is happening across Gippsland in the regenerative / sustainable agriculture space.

It has been a great opportunity to tap into previous research, learn about current and upcoming projects in the agricultural sector and also look for opportunities to collaborate.

### **Water Trailer**

LCLN was successful with funding through Latrobe City Council's Minor Capital Works Program. The funds have been used to purchase a water trailer which will be available to Landcare Groups in 2021 for watering trees.

### **Latrobe Valley Authority Funding**

Latrobe Valley Authority has funded the Network to run a series of small bug blitz workshops across the Network. The activities funded were 2 x Expo style activity days with 6 activities per day including: Water monitoring and Water bugs, Soils and composting, Bush tucker and bushfood gardening, Seed collection and propagation, Creating and growing a veggie garden, Bird monitoring. Unfortunately these activities have been postponed until Autumn 2021 and an extension for the funding has been sought from LVA.

### **Food for all Latrobe Valley**

Food for all Latrobe Valley is committed to improving access and availability to quality, fresh produce to all members of the community. Marnie has been attending regular meetings as a representative of LCLN to assist in promoting Landcare. The other reason for attending these meetings has been to learn what others are doing in the community and look for ways to collaborate on locally based sustainability and food sovereignty projects.

<https://www.facebook.com/FoodForAllLatrobeValley/>

## Chair's Report LCLN 2020

Peter Devonshire

There is a report from our staff that John has compiled about our accomplishments this year. My thanks to John and Marnie for their efforts. My thanks to Phil for his treasury efforts and the other board members especially for involvement with the completion of our Prospectus (led by Ian) and the review of our Strategic Plan (led by Margaret and Eric).

With the COVID-19 outbreak and the associated government restrictions and WGCMA protocols face to face meetings have been rare with telephone and computer auspiced meetings the norm. The Board and Employment Steering Committee continue to review our staffing needs and arrangements. Some of the proposed projects for 2020 were postponed due to restrictions and budgeted project management remuneration to LCLN has not been forthcoming. In addition, the government gave notice that the Facilitator funding process would be reviewed with a new process to be established during last half of 2020. The previous funding arrangement was extended for six months to enable this to happen. The plan was to have the process completed and facilitators appointed by Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 2021. At this stage I can report that the reporting process has not commenced (let alone department response, advertising, interviewing and appointment) and is unlikely to before the state budget is presented whenever that may be. We wait (with concern) to see what is in store for Landcare.

We welcomed Sam Shannon who replaced Belinda Brennan who was seconded to specialist duties elsewhere in WGCMA. He has continued the cooperative spirit of advice and liaison provided by the WGCMA in support of Landcare.

Recently Marnie has given notice that she will be resigning her role with West Gippsland subnetwork. She moves into the role she previously performed at a regional level with WGCMA. She is no longer able to juggle the two roles with her other family and business commitments. We thank her sincerely for her efforts and the way in which she opened our eyes to systems and ideas which we can take forward. Until we have clarity with the ongoing facilitator funding, we will not be advertising this position. Most of her projects will be completed or brought to a point where the new person can pick up and run. But in the meantime, John will need to rationalise his work plan to keep all the balls in the air. Please consider this before seeking advice and information from him until the new person is imbedded.

The year has been one of continued consolidation of ongoing projects and the further development of the network by our staff. We have been working (as much as COVID restrictions allow) with our partners including Energy Australia, local councils and other Landcare networks in the delivery of activities, education and training. I acknowledge the solid and ongoing support of WGCMA in our organisation and activities.

We look forward to more reasonable inter-personal contact arrangements in the new year to enable the landcare community to meet and support each other. This is a key aspect of Landcare; people supporting people. Hopefully projects will fly and funding is increased and assured in a timely manner.

As a board we have much talent but few numbers. It comprises Alison Craven, Phil Darton, Caroline Doolan, Ian Hill, Darryl Marks, Margaret and Eric Smith. A couple of us will be



dropping off the LCLN perch in the coming years so now is a good time to join and become part of an important and necessary part of Landcare. I look forward to some applications. We do have additional vacant positions to fill.

## **Treasurer's Report for the year ended 30 June 2020**

### **AGM 11 November 2020**

Phil Darton,

Treasurer, LCLN

This report is presented in conjunction with the audited 2019/2020 Financial Statements.

The Opening Balance at 1 July 2019: \$273,274.10

The Closing Balance at 30 June 2020: \$194,196.79

The change in the balance is due, in part, to the way grants and funds for multi-year projects are spent in any one financial year. Money may come in one year but isn't completely spent until the next. However, 2020 has been a difficult year with restrictions around COVID-19 also effecting Grant income. As a consequence, a reduction in income has been exacerbated by an increase in expenditure as work and expenditure continues on existing projects.

The only concern the Auditor expressed is that the Network has now had a negative cash flow in four of the past five years. The Board also shares this concern and will continue to investigate ways to increase project funding. This, in an environment where Government funding for the Facilitator Program must be supplemented from other Grants to run the work of the Network.

As Peter has stated in his Chair's report, until we have clarity on the facilitator funding beyond December 2020 we will proceed cautiously with reduced facilitator input to our program.

I would like to thank Lucy Laurie-Rhodes 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. John Crosby and Marnie Ellis were a great support and, as always, very patient.

## Group Reports

### Tanjil Valley

#### *President Charlie Pinch*

With a stable membership the group maintains a healthy status and provides a valuable service to the Willow Grove community. Unfortunately, COVID meant that the group only managed to meet twice this year which were farm walks held in February and March.

In 2019 Willow Grove Primary School once again assisted in a Schools Tree Day event on the Blue Rock Lake Walking Track when approximately 800 plants went in the ground. In 2020 with no school assistance and extra plants, over 1000 plants were planted by members and the local community, again along the walking track.

Some local roadside weed control was completed with Broom and Spanish Heath targeted. Picking up roadside rubbish was also carried out by some dedicated members.

The group continues to increase its assets with a recently purchased Power Planter and two Trail cameras, which have been put to good use already. With quite a good public presence we look forward to the future and further engaging the local communities of Hill End, Willow Grove, Fumina, Westbury and Tanjil South.



### Mountain Rivers Landcare Group

#### *David Lowe*

Mountain Rivers Landcare Group has been pretty quiet given the year, with general maintenance being the main focus, to enhance the water quality in the Tyers River Catchment (The primary focus of the group). That is, keeping ahead of weeds, improving/rehabilitating fencing, clearing unwanted underbrush and planting trees to thwart gully erosion.

But:

I undertook a historical project in 'recycling' a section of a felled tree. – ie. Splitting a Log.

Well what else would you do during winter in a Covid lockdown but split a log into fence posts using traditional methods with axes, wedges, mallet, sledgehammer and adze

A little background:

Every month I put together historical articles for the Thomson Times our local newspaper.

So, the production of railway sleepers using hand tools in the early twentieth became an article.

A neighbour needed to remove a eucalypt from his property, so after discussing who needed firewood most, I ended up with a 25 foot trunk in my top paddock.

I sized up the trunk and thought, "I could do something useful with this". I can get creative with the six foot at the butt end and use the rest for firewood. So, cut the top bit up into firebox size and split then left the six foot butt to split in half lengthwise then into fence posts.

The task certainly was not done on one day but over a month or so, a little bit at a time.

In conclusion, a satisfying task to complete but the pioneers 'did not have it easy'.

In think, given time and effort, about \$100 a fine hand-hewn post!!



**1. The Log**



**2. Starting a Wedge**



**3. Inserting a wedge**



**4. More wedges**



**5. Expanding the crack**



**6. Completely Split**



**7. Select third section of log**



**8. Splitting to create a post**



**9. More wedges**



**10. Completed product**



## **Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare Group**

This year in August Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare Group's AGM was held on a video and phone link facilitated by Marnie Ellis from LCLN.

Our President, Chris Lange welcomed everyone and thanked group and executive members for all the enthusiasm and work they've put in spite of the challenges that we've faced. Chris also welcomed three new households who joined our group during the year and thanked Marnie for her help with managing our Annual General Meeting.

Our group has two large and several smaller projects on the go.

### **Billys Creek**

**Is a three year project.** It's funded by a *Biodiversity On-ground Action - Community & Volunteer Action* grant from the state Government Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning. (DELWP). We are working on a steep and fairly remote 33ha site which is reserved forest managed by HVP under the Strzelecki Cores and Links agreement. Parts of the site are either over-run with Blackberry or aren't actually forest – which is where our project comes in. We are planting areas of pasture, scrub and blackberry back to forest, which is very exciting.

In August 2019 volunteers from our group and the *Gippsland Intrepid Landcare Group* planted the first tube-stock on the east side of the site, followed up during the next few weeks with more planting by contractors from *Habitat Creations*. In June 2020 we had a contractor plant more seedlings in this area and we've also been maintaining the site.

In September Graeme, Joelle and Peter carried plants in hiko trays into the western section 2019 via the Grand Strzelecki Track. These were to supplement the direct seeding done in that area earlier in the year.

Another 2ha of blackberries were sprayed in January 2020. This was followed up over May to September this year by direct seeding into the dead canes and planting and more tube-stock carried in via a neighbouring property and a rope descent to the creek. This route cut the number of creek crossings from twenty-six to just six.

### **Direct Seeding trial**

**Our 2019 AGM had Bronwyn Teesdale as our guest speaker.** Bronwyn has many years of experience in direct seeding projects.

The following day we worked with the Friends of Morwell National Park to direct seed a trial area on Blue Gum Hill. Like our re-veg block further upstream, the Billy's Creek section of the National Park wasn't all bush when the park was gazetted, and some areas of former farmland haven't yet been planted. A tube stock planting some years ago in this area had failed, but the Friends group still had seed collected in the National Park that we were able to use for this trial. Our efforts and the outcomes 12 months on are documented in the Friends group Newsletters from August 2019 and August and September 2020.

[http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net/browser/newsletter\\_archive.html](http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net/browser/newsletter_archive.html)



## **Middle Creek**

### **Most of the Upper Middle Creek valley and its hinterland was burned in a bushfire during March 2019.**

At the time our group had no resources, and we were unable to get anyone to take immediate action on installing sediment traps or planting the steep slopes that were left bare by the fire. A wet winter and spring this year has meant that there are now some bad landslips along the valley and Upper Middle Creek Road is closed.

Last winter we put in a bit of tubestock along the creek, as did some local residents. However, without browser guards, much of this was predated. There are a lot of feral deer in that valley, and the surviving wallabies were pretty hungry.

By the middle of last year, we had agreed with West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) to collaborate on a project to re-vegetate the riparian zone along the creek during the winter of 2020. The CMA had secured some funds, and our group had received a substantial philanthropic donation towards restoring the creek.

Later in 2019 we learned that we'd also been selected to receive a *Communities Environment* program grant from the Commonwealth Government and this was used to extend and advance the project.

We worked with the CMA on allocating species to be grown or bought between us, and we decided to spread the risk of trying to grow everything ourselves, by asking Mirboo North High School to grow seedlings for us.

Then we got a global pandemic, and the school was largely closed for much of the growing season. Audrey, Rob and Ange did practically all the work to grow the tube-stock that came from the school. Chris, on behalf of the group, offered our special thanks to Audrey for piloting this huge task through the summer holidays, government health restrictions and the disruptions to her own schoolwork.

The pandemic also scuttled our plans for community planting days and collaborating with the CMA, the angling clubs and the local fire recovery committee on running these.

We were able to use a contractor plant and install guards and the CMA arranged site preparation. Peter from our group excelled himself in planting many extra trees, shrubs and understory plants to improve the biodiversity value of the work and the amount of coverage on the planting sites.

## **Seed Collecting**

We prepared for the summer seed collecting period by running a Plant Identification [and pizza] day at Jeeralang North hall in October 2019. The *Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club* provided identification expertise. Several *Gippsland Intrepid Landcare* members joined us on the day.

In January and February 2020 our *Communities Environment* program grant enabled us to run three expert-led seed collection sessions and a field day with Jenny Wolswinkel from *Seeds of Gippsland*.



Our group collected more than 85 batches of seed last summer. Direct seeding needs a LOT of seed, and we managed to get more than 25 species into our seed mix for the riparian area of Billy's Creek.

We added several new books to our library to help us with plant identification.

Seed collection means that that we are now active in the bush during summer as well as winter, and we became suddenly and acutely aware that we needed rucksack-sized snakebite and first aid kits. So we bought some.

### **More Direct Seeding**

The *Communities Environment Program* grant also funded us to direct seed an area on private property to extend a previous koala corridor planting to the other side of a steep gully at Yinnar South. We planted this site in May 2020.

### **Weed Control**

Our annual Maple Massacre / Sycamore Slaughter in the Budgeree Bushland Reserve was rained off in November. We re-convened in April and much work was done with target plants easier to see as they change colour in autumn. Natural generation of native species is coming along very well in areas previously cleared of maples.

Our weed control signs were placed around the district by Eric and we added a weed ID book to our library.

### **Greenhouse**

Our wash up [and pizza] day at the Jeeralang North hall held with our Plant identification workshop in October 2019 kept our tubes and trays nice and our label tags clean and easy to write on. There were fewer losses of tube-stock this growing season and no washed out mystery plant labels.

Group members enjoyed several good green-housing days prior to government health restrictions. We managed to grow more than 1,600 tubes of seedlings and we added scoria to the greenhouse floor.

Chris thanked Dave for keeping the plants alive amidst equipment problems and for welcoming us to work in the greenhouse.



*Direct seeding trial on Blue Gum Hill with Friends of Morwell National Park*



*Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare and friends collecting seed at Jeeralang January 2020*



*Billy's Creek Project: Planting canopy trees on the surrounding slopes will protect the ferns, vines and rainforest plants in the gullies on our re-veg block.*



## **Springsure Hill**

Eric Smith (Secretary)

As everyone is saying, this year has been different.

Perhaps surprisingly we have had a number of new members and new people approaching the group. For 2019-20 we did really well at retaining membership as well as picking up a few previously lapsed members – though getting people to pay subs this year is proving much harder. Our total of 33 households is the highest for some years.

Our events in the past 12 months (mostly before March):

- a new members evening to ask questions and share new ideas.
- our AGM and BBQ, together with a bush walk around the native vegetation part of one member's property.
- an evening with a rep from DELWP discussing Controlled Burns – theory and practice.
- an enjoyable BBQ and ideas night, where the only disappointment was that the mosquitos drove us inside before the micro-bats came out.
- a submission (unsuccessful) to Smart Farms Small Grants around sustainable farming.
- helping a couple of landowners access the blue gums distributed through John.

The emphasis in a Covid year has been on communication: ensuring all our members receive the network news and details about the many webinars and on-line events that have proliferated in the absence of face-to-face gatherings. Our own Newsletter has as usual gone 3 times a year to 240 households in our patch of Baw Baw.

Love the Land. Smile with creation. Enjoy your place

## **Woorabinda School Camp**

### **Karen McCarthy Teacher**

- We added 200 plants to our wildlife corridor being developed in the top Western paddock.
- Wildlife Unlimited conducted a fauna survey from 21<sup>st</sup> April to 25<sup>th</sup> May. Three remote cameras were placed across the span of Woorabinda in different habitat areas and two remote recorders were placed at different ponds to record fauna over four weeks. Findings included:
  - Six new native mammal species previously not recorded in the 2014 assessment (The Agile Antechinus, White-footed Dunnart, Mountain Brushtail Possum (with a baby), Little Forest Bat, Eastern Freetail Bat and White-striped Freetail bat).
  - Long-nosed bandicoots were recorded on all three remote camera's across Woorabinda.
  - Our next survey will be conducted in warmer weather to investigate the presence of other fauna, notably bats, frogs and reptiles.
- Interested staff used lockdown time to develop their knowledge and skills by attending online zoom sessions such as 'applying for grants'
- In 2019 and early 2020, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria) undertook two deer culls. They successfully, and humanely, made a small reduction to our deer population, but this remains an ongoing problem.

### **Setbacks:**

- The coronavirus saw students cease attending Woorabinda from the first lockdown in April until just last week (20<sup>th</sup> October). This directly resulted in a lack of plantings being undertaken in 2020, which was further impacted by staff also being unable to be on site due isolation and complying with the education department restrictions.
- Deer have trampled through our newly established wildlife corridor in the top Western paddock. They have also stripped bare and knocked over three-year old trees from previous plantings.



## **Boolarra South**

### **Denise Schiller Secretary**

Boolarra South Landcare Group activities have been affected, as have we all, by Covid 19 this year.

We began well with our monthly working bees which were followed by lunch and completed weed control and track maintenance at the Old Mill Site and Apex park. We put up some nest boxes at the Mill Site and things were proceeding nicely.

Corrections Victoria were coming once a month to mow at the Mill Site and Interchange Victoria were bringing some clients with secateurs to prune as they walked the tracks. The group was quite strong with a number of new members and we were expecting to have a productive year.

Despite the restrictions we have made progress. We managed to plant trees on public land with our allocation from the network and have been able to source additional trees to give to members so that has been good.

We had monthly meetings until March and as restrictions eased held one outdoor meeting with 10 socially distanced members and no refreshments! We are considering purchasing a mulcher so that we do not have to get DELWP to come and burn our pile; the paperwork they have to do for this is the same as when they undertake a forest burn. An environmentally better solution would be a mulcher so investigations are underway to determine the capacity we will need and its cost.

Our Billy Goat Slasher has been well used getting blackberries on the bank of the Morwell River and for making paths through large patches so that we can spray more effectively.

We will hold an AGM in November, planned for outdoors unless otherwise advised and hope that 2021 enables us to work as a group once more.

## **Neerim District Landcare Group**

### **Phil Darton Secretary**

While the Neerim District Landcare Group (NDLG) has been constrained by COVID-19 in what public and member activities it has been able to conduct in 2020, it has been able to continue the Tarago Catchment Healthy Farms program funded by Melbourne Water. This work has largely been restricted to the on farm works program. The community engagement component of the program was started in November 2019, before the COVID lockdown with a citizen science project – Wildlife in Tarago farm waterways.

### **Wildlife in Tarago farm waterways – a citizen science program**

Neerim District Landcare Group partnered again with Jindivick Landcare Group and EnviroDNA to sample streams supplying water to the Tarago Reservoir for environmental DNA. Landcare members collected water samples from 8 sites across two different catchment areas flowing into the Tarago Reservoir as well as a local wetland and artificial ponds at two local primary schools. DNA was extracted from the samples back at the EnviroDNA laboratory. 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. The full results are yet to be presented back to the members. We are waiting for COVID-19 restrictions to ease before calling public meetings to report the detailed results and to discuss implications and avenues of further study.

### **Primary school habitat garden**

The Healthy Farms program also provided some funds to help the Neerim South Primary School establish a habitat garden in the school grounds. This follows an earlier establishment of frog ponds at the school. Two limited working bees, carefully following COVID safe protocols, have recently been run to prepare the ground and commence planting for the garden. This work will continue when it is safe to do so.

### **Tarago Catchment Healthy Farms Program**

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. 2700 metres of fencing, 13,000 indigenous plants as well as track and culvert works have been carried out through the year.

**Photos from water sampling day for Wildlife in Tarago farm waterways project in November 2019**

