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Friends of the Barwon - Newsletter May 2022

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Chair's Message - Trevor Hodson

This is my first newsletter as incoming President for the Friends. I would like to acknowledge and thank Kaye Rodden for her time as inaugural president of the Friends. Without her valuable contribution we would not be in the position we now find ourselves. The Friends have a voice and we need to keep pressing our concerns to ensure the Barwon catchment thrives.

Members may recall that the Wettenhall Environment trust made a generous donation of \$30,000 to our organisation and this has allowed us to employ a part-time Executive Officer. The successful candidate was Liz Hamilton and Liz brings her expertise to the

job. One of her first tasks will be to review the membership lists so we can expedite the renewal process for the next financial year. Notices will be sent out towards the end of June. Another task will be getting deductible gift recipient (DGR) status for FOTB, so that groups or individuals can make tax-deductible donations to fund our work. DGR status is a requisite for most of the philanthropic organisations before they will support us.

The first meeting of the new Committee was held on the 11th of May. Andrea Montgomery was welcomed and the Committee will be looking to co-opt members as the need arises to help with particular projects.

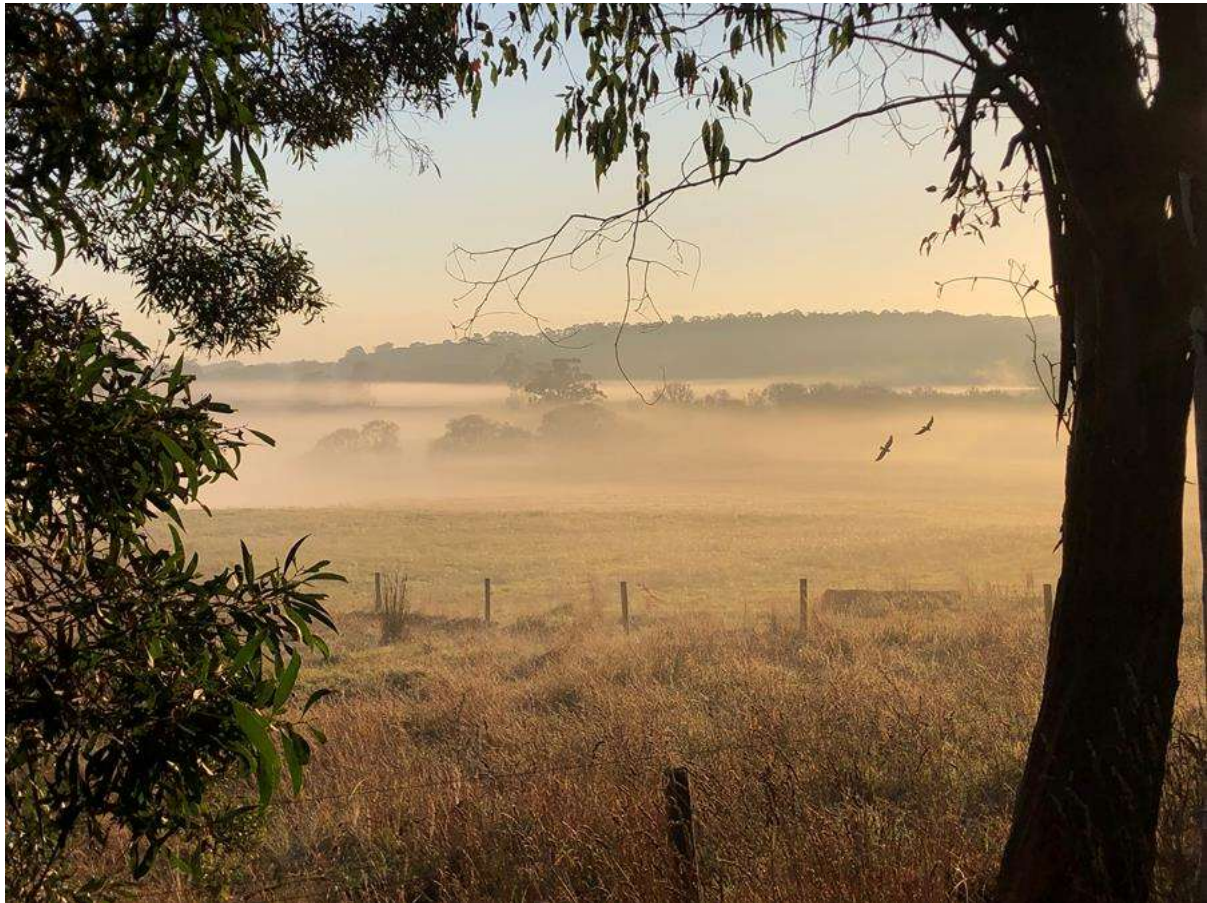
One project that has been completed is the Platypus eDNA Survey of the Middle and Lower Barwon. A surprise was the finding of platypus populating the Leigh River. There is now a baseline to measure changes in the population of platypus in our rivers. Our grateful thanks to the many volunteers who took part in the sample collection, to Josh Griffiths, for the analysis and report and to the Tucker Foundation, the major sponsor, as well as Golden Plains and Surf Coast Shires for their contributions. Copies of the report are available from the Upper Barwon Landcare Network.

Work continues on the Sustainable Water Strategy (SWS) and we are contributing to the Concerned Waterways Alliance who are pressing for better outcomes for our waterways and wetlands. One area ruled out in the SWS is the use of recycled water for drinking (potable) use. Given the combined output of Class A recycled water from the Western and Eastern Treatment Plants of Melbourne Water is over 300 GL per year or about 40% of Melbourne's water needs it is a great discredit to the Government and its advisers that this option has been explicitly ruled out in the SWS. Imagine how our waterways could be transformed if that water was used to relieve the extraction of water already taking place from our rivers.

The year ahead will have many opportunities for the Friends to shape the future of our waterways. We are hoping to engage and collaborate with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners as our concerns are very much aligned. We have representatives on the Ovoid Aqueduct Project that will see a new parkland area established under the leadership of the Wadawurrung. We hope to be involved also in the recently launched shared project between the CCMA and Wadawurrung – the Places of many Stories. The first stage will be developing a Masterplan.

Any organisation is only as good as its people. If you feel you have something to offer or want the Committee to pursue a project or tackle a problem, don't hesitate to get in touch.

I look forward to the next twelve months and getting things done for our river, Trevor Hodson.



Platypus search in the lower Barwon Catchment – Update/Results

The recent Environmental DNA (eDNA) assessment of platypus distribution in the lower Barwon River, incorporating grass-roots citizen science, contributed to the largest continuous survey for this iconic species in Victoria.

This is the first systematic survey of platypus populations in the lower Barwon Catchment and fills an important gap in contemporary platypus distribution following similar projects in the upper Barwon and Moorabool Regions

The current results confirm platypuses are currently widely distributed throughout the lower Barwon Catchment area although populations may be fragmented with clusters of positive sites evident in the lower Moorabool and Leigh Rivers and few in the lower Barwon River. Interestingly, there was very few historical records of platypuses in the Leigh River, highlighting the limitations of anecdotal sightings.

These results provide a good indication of the target species' distribution throughout the area. Importantly, there is now baseline data against which to assess future changes in platypus populations in response to natural disturbances or management actions.

The seemingly fragmented nature of platypuses in the lower Barwon Catchment indicates efforts to improve conditions for this species should focus on the lower Barwon River between Fyansford and Inverleigh to facilitate connection between populations in the Leigh and Moorabool Rivers.

The findings are summarised in the report: *Citizen Science: Investigating the distribution of platypuses throughout the lower Barwon River Catchment using environmental DNA*.

If you would like us to send you an electronic copy of this report, please email: friendsofthebarwon@gmail.com



Big Swamp and Boundary Creek Remediation Update

Barwon water recently ran two community drop-in sessions to talk about progress with their remediation work at Boundary Creek and Big Swamp, as well as an update on the surrounding environment investigation.

Conditions at Big swamp have improved with water level data indicating the recovery and re-pressurisation of the Lower Tertiary Aquifer. This is evidenced by both the groundwater levels from monitoring bores installed within the swamp and the reduced occurrence of no-flow events, as well as the increase in pH levels within Boundary Creek downstream of the swamp. However, the data from 1 January to 31 March 2022 shows that the groundwater levels and quality continue to be subject to seasonal variation, with decreases in pH and spikes in acidity concentrations (as measured during routine sampling works) occurring during dryer periods, despite the long-term increasing trends. This is consistent with the information presented in the Remediation Options Assessment (CDM Smith, 2019).

Barwon Water (BW) is currently assessing suitable contingency measures and developing a water treatment system to manage the acidity and metal loads that continue to present a risk to the surrounding environment including the Barwon River. As part of this, BW is investigating an upstream treatment option involving the novel use of caustic magnesia (MgO) in neutralising acidity-affected portions of the swamp and assess any potential ecological risks associated with this approach. This trial will then inform whether it is a feasible option to be undertaken at a greater scale. This approach will be discussed at the upcoming Remediation Reference Group meeting.

The planned construction of hydraulic barriers and infilling of fire trenches remains on hold due to the upstream treatment options investigation and recent improvement in conditions both within and downstream of the swamp. The REPP is also investigating whether other areas within the regional groundwater system have been impacted by historic management of groundwater pumping at the Barwon Downs Borefield. Areas to be investigated include reaches along the Barwon River, Gellibrand River, Ten Mile Creek, Yahoo Creek and potential groundwater dependent ecosystems near Gellibrand, Yeodene, Deans Marsh and Loves Creek.

Barwon Water are currently not maintaining the borefield (for operation) and have stated in their draft Urban Water Strategy (Water for the Future), that Barwon Downs groundwater is not part of our regions water future; this also indicates Barwon water's intentions for this borefield.

Barwon Water is currently working on developing a decommissioning plan for the Barwon Downs borefield. The plan will need to be submitted and accepted by Southern Rural Water prior to undertaking any decommissioning activities. At this stage, any accepted decommissioning works are likely to occur between 2023 and 2028 as part of BW's next 5-year price submission – the action plan that sets out how BW will deliver services and the prices customers will pay on their water bills. Barwon Water will continue to share updates on the decommissioning plan development with the community.

Image of vegetation die back at Big Swamp - courtesy LAWROC



Concerned Waterways Alliance (CWA) Update

The CWA have prepared a report on progress with their recommendations to DELWP on the Sustainable Water Strategy (SWS) for Southern Victoria. The Victorian State Budget has allocated \$56.6 million to deliver the first phase of projects in the SWS. The SWS will be crucial as it is the first serious attempt to tackle water issues in the actual, unfolding climate crisis.

Summarised below are the key points about the draft and the progress on the CWA recommendations to date.

The draft Central and Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy (C&GSWS) admits that climate change is real, and the rivers of Southern Victoria cannot afford to give up any more water. (The draft document was prepared by the SWS team at DELWP.)

The missing heart of the draft is that economic uses continue to be prioritised over social, environmental, and cultural uses, and by doing so rivers will suffer the cost.

The draft is a substitution strategy, satisfying increased demand with increased manufactured water, demand management, improved water use efficiency and integrated water management.

Agriculture largely escapes scrutiny even though it accounts for 35% of water use. The draft even proposes opening of new irrigation areas.

Strong science-based targets for water recovery for rivers are not set. Instead, minimal flows are proposed over a time frame too long to prevent local extinctions.

Progress from CWA Recommendations to the DELWP team on the SWS

DELWP has indicated it will provide more clarity on how water recovery targets will be achieved.

DELWP is working on a proposal to gradually reduce the volume of water that water corporations are entitled to take from rivers.

CWA called for a moratorium on issue of new water extraction licences. In response, DELWP proposes that any unallocated water will only be made available to traditional owners or to meet critical human needs.

CWA has proposed a systematic review of s51 groundwater licences in the upcoming Victorian Groundwater Management strategy, GM2030.

DELWP will undertake a study of small farm dams in the upper Maribyrnong and Moorabool catchments over the next 12 months. This work will inform policy responses to adverse cumulative impacts on water ecosystems from multiple sources of diversion.

CWA has elevated the issue of emerging contaminants in recycled water. We expect to see stronger guidelines for release of recycled water into the environment.

Where progress is still needed

Rivers need to be recognised as living entities connected from source to sea and to wetlands and floodplains, with ecological processes and functions intact and healthy. The proposed 5- and 10-year targets are not adequate to halt the ecological decline of our rivers.

The government continues to oppose effective means of returning water to stressed rivers, such as buying back licences from willing sellers or regulating take of water for stock and domestic use or for farm dams.

We must consider all sources of manufactured water, including potable reuse of recycled water, and we cannot rely solely on augmentations of supply such as desalination.

The Victorian Water Act requires the SWS to take the precautionary principle into account. This principle should be embedded in the SWS for all allocation and licencing decisions to prevent 'serious or irreversible' risks of environmental damage including from emerging contaminants such as PFAS.

Water rights proposals put forward by Traditional Owners in the draft strategy should be enacted in the final SWS version. Water justice objectives for Aboriginal peoples generally overlap with environmental objectives.

Ramsar listed wetlands in the Gippsland Lakes, the Lower Barwon and Bellarine Peninsula must be ecologically protected as required by their international listing including by ensuring restoration of watering requirements.

Conclusion

The SWS is required to set the strategic agenda for managing Southern Victoria's water resources for the next 10 years. It must find ways to improve the environmental condition of rivers and wetlands in the region, address the impacts of climate change and provide for secure water supplies for cities, towns and agriculture. There remains a big gap between what our rivers need and what the government is proposing for them. There is still significant work for government to do to get the SWS right and CWA will continue to strive for this end.

Launch of the Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut (Place of many stories)

Tuesday April 26 saw a diverse group gather at the Fyansford Common for the launch of the *Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut- Place of many stories* project and masterplan development. This is one of the actions supported by the Victorian Government through the *Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluck) Action Plan*. The project encompasses an extensive corridor of river frontage on Wadawurrung Country, including the internationally recognised Lake Connemare wetlands and the spectacular Barwon River estuary. *Kitjarra- dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut* is the Wadawurrung name for the project previously known as the Barwon River Parklands.

The project name *Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut* was assigned by Wadawurrung Traditional Owners translating to “places of many stories”. The logo was developed by Wadawurrung artist Chloe Chatterton through a process run by the Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation.

In Chloe’s words “*The Barwon and Moorabool Rivers were used as ‘highways’ and gathering places for our Old People to tell our Stories. My art shows how the rivers were used to connect our People, tell our stories and how the rivers cared for our Dja. The two hands represent the healing of our Country.*”

A very moving Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony was conducted by Wadawurrung members among a grove of trees on the floodplain. The mystical sound of the didgeridoo continued throughout the smoking ceremony.

John Riddiford (CEO CCMA) spoke about the importance of using Wadawurrung knowledge to inform planning for the protection of waterways and indigenous pathways. He commented that in 1927 the MMBW and Public Works Department developed a far-reaching plan to protect the open spaces, floodplains and waterways of Melbourne. This plan was not changed and fully implemented in the 1970s. We hope through the Barwon River Masterplan process we can achieve a similar result.

Well known Wadawurrung elder, Uncle Bryon, spoke passionately about how 4 generations of his clan had campaigned for protection of the rivers, the fourth being artist Chloe Chatterton who he introduced. He spoke of the degradation of the streams in his time and hoped that action will happen soon. Uncle Bryon had travelled for this occasion from Renmark where he lives only 100 metres from a waterway where he regularly communes with nature. He would prefer to be living on a river on his own country but land prices near Geelong were too high.

FOTB have offered our support in the *Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut*–project and masterplan development.



The Value of Riparian Buffers

The vegetation along the banks of our waterways is termed “riparian buffers” and is an important line of defence for our waterways. They create a barrier that helps to intercept pollutants and slow down run off before it enters our streams. Without them silt and fertilisers leech into our rivers leading to eutrophication and loss of biodiversity.

These riparian ecosystems have a rich and unique biodiversity. They act as corridors connecting other ecosystems in the broader landscape which is vital for much of our native fauna, especially during changing climatic conditions.

Well-designed buffers should be at least twenty metres wide on both sides of the waterway. Ideally, they should be fenced to limit or prohibit stock access to the river bank and also to limit vehicle access and any other soil disturbance.

If stock are excluded then alternative watering points (troughs) should be provided in the adjacent paddocks or a single stock access point to the waterway provided to reduce disturbance of the bank and effluent contamination.

If paddocks by the stream are used for cropping the same applies to reduce fertiliser run off. The first element is a grassy strip to slow down run off. Next comes a range of

trees and shrubs, selected from local species, to provide habitat and shelter. Some of the plantings should be quick growing to ensure establishment.

What will these buffers do? They will intercept nutrients and sediments before they can enter the river, banks will be stabilised and less subject to flood damage, stream temperatures will be lowered making conditions more suitable for aquatic fauna, carbon will be sequestered and wildlife corridors will be formed. Predator insects will populate the canopy and lead to lower use of pesticides and the biodiversity of the stream bank will be increased.

If this sounds like a broken record playing in your ears, it is. Restoration and the protection of riparian vegetation is one of the most important ways we can improve the health of our waterways. If you have bare stream banks, please consider their revegetation as a high priority and contact your local CMA or Landcare community as help is available for your project.

Image: Barwon River near Queens Park, Courtesy of www.alltrails.com



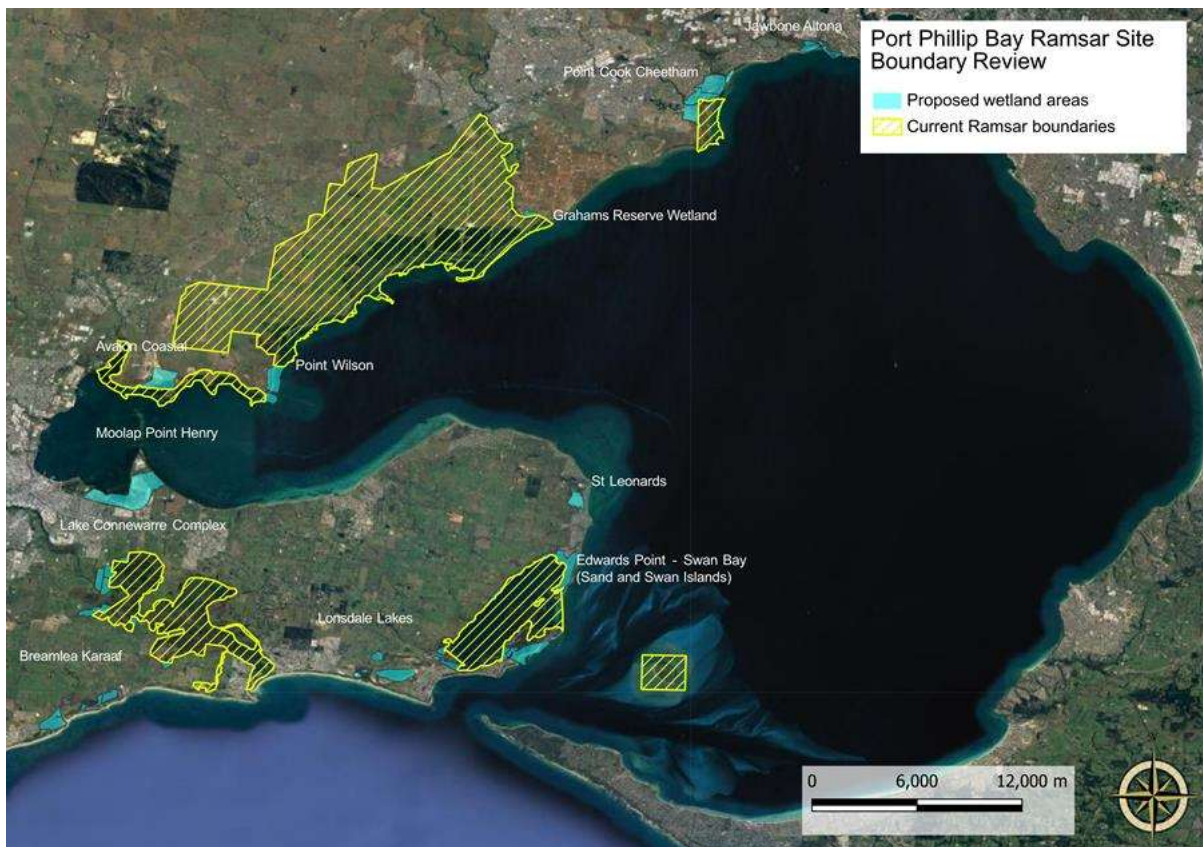
Port Phillip/Bellarine RAMSAR Wetland boundary extension – Have your say

DELWP are seeking your thoughts about the wetland areas that are proposed for inclusion in the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site.

Additionally, four online events are scheduled for the various wetland areas, starting 23rd May. These events aim to discuss the potential addition of other wetlands to the existing Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Sites.

Consultation closes 10 June 2022.

To have your say, go to the Engage Victoria website: [Port Phillip Bay and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site Boundary Review | Engage Victoria](#)



Virtual Citizen Science - Bellarine Catchment Network

Bellarine Catchment Network have recently launched their newest video on '[Virtual Citizen Science](#)', a brief look into the citizen science apps 'iNaturalist', 'FeralScan' and 'ClimateWatch' and how almost anybody can use them, almost anywhere. This video was filmed by [Remember The Wild](#) and is supported by Coastcare Victoria and the Victorian Government.

You can watch the video on the BCN's YouTube channel or click the play button below: <https://youtu.be/qLdV00mbm-w>

Please feel free to forward this email and/or attached flyer through your networks and to any volunteers, project partners and colleagues that may be interested.



[Protect the Bellarine](#)

Protect the Bellarine is a recently formed group who are keen to stop inappropriate development and preserve the natural beauty and liveability of the Bellarine Peninsula. Protect the Bellarine formed '*after discovering that the current Distinctive Area and Landscapes (DAL) Advisory Committee hearing is geared approximately 80% towards developers and their associates often represented by QC's and about 20% towards*

those with a non-commercial interest we decided that we needed a website that simply provides a resource to the Bellarine community. and their concern that residents'.

The Bellarine DAL process is open for 6 weeks and petitions have been initiated by Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads organisations.

For more information, visit [Protect the Bellarine](#)



New FOTB Executive Officer

Thanks to a generous grant from the Wettenhall Environment Trust, FOTB has been able to employ me (Liz Hamilton) as a part-time Executive Officer for 12 months.

For those of you who don't know me, I've been living in the Otway Ranges since 1990 when I moved down this way to work for the Victorian government, managing the regions pine plantations. From there I worked in farm forestry, renewable energy, climate change mitigation and adaption in agriculture, emergency management and the aboriginal landholder information service. I've also had a few years working with NGO's back in the 80's.

I'm really pleased to have been offered the Executive Officer role and to be a part of the great work that our members are actively and passionately involved in. Working on important environmental issues, outside of government again, is a such refreshing change for me. My key tasks will be around building our membership and member involvement with FOTB, enquiries, website and social media communication and organising events and other activities, seeking funding to help FOTB grow and contributing to submissions'

If you've got any suggestions as to how we could expand our reach, or if there are others matters or impacts concerning the Barwon River catchment you'd like to

discuss, then please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at friendsofthebarwon@gmail.com or phone me on: 0400 780 680.

A big thanks to Sarah Brien for the great work she has done in this role prior to me taking up the role and for easing me gently into her considerably big shoes!

Friends of the Barwon AGM Summary

Our recent AGM, held at the Jeff Sykes Rowing Centre in South Geelong was well attended by over 30 members. Below is a summary of the event:

Geelong Rowing VP Rob England addressed the meeting and spoke of how the new Jeff Sykes Rowing Centre has been built with public subscriptions and no government support. The Barwon in Geelong is one of the best waters for rowing in Australia and the new facility caters for the increased number of rowers (currently more girls than boys) in Geelong. Rowing Geelong needs support of community groups to maintain and improve the condition of the river for many boating activities.

Melinda Kennedy, Co-Director of Muriyul Consultants and Traditional Water Knowledge holder was the AGM guest speaker. Melinda gave a passionate address stressing the importance of Lal Lal Falls and Connewarre as indigenous sacred sites that are linked by water in the Moorabool River. The river is a living spirit that must not be broken and threats to the linking spirit are numerous.

Outgoing FOTB Chair, Kaye Rodden, reflected on the time since Friends of the Barwon formed, just over two years ago. Members first had that drop in a bucket idea of bringing all the community together across the catchment to speak up for our waterways... it has always been about the catchment. At our inaugural meeting, guest speaker Juliet Le Feuvre, spoke fervently about the need to rethink the role that our waterways played in our everyday lives. Threats to these waterways include a significant imbalance between the amount of water now available to even maintain current flows and the amount of water needed to provide for our growing human demands. Over these intervening years the threats have not abated and in some respects they have expanded.

Kaye spoke optimistically about *'the growing realisation in the broader community that something is not right. Not just with our larger waterways, such as the Barwon, Leigh and Moorabool, but with our smaller tributaries, local wetlands, and floodplains.... people's back yards, their swimming pools or fishing spots.*

For example, the Karaaf Wetlands, where storm water is polluting this important saline wetland with silt, rubbish and fresh water, and the locals who are now advocating for changes in managing this area, using strong scientific evidence to support their cause.

Or the Friends of Cowies Creek crew, who have battled vandalism and neglect to try to resurrect their back yards... always with the pressure of increased development on the banks of the creek.

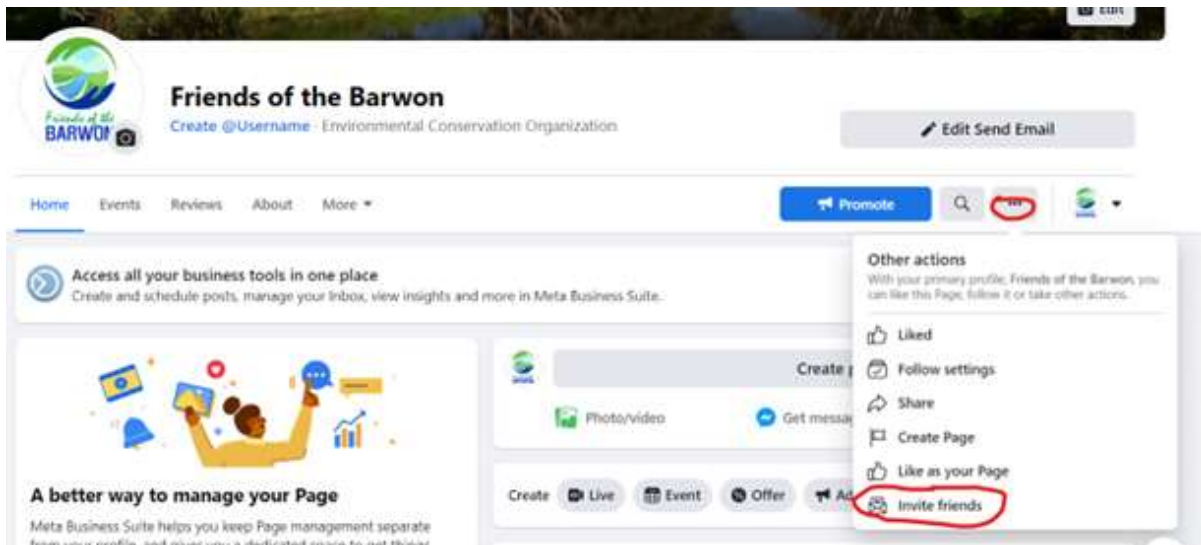
Or the ‘Little Creeks Do Matter’ initiative where the Bunanyung Landscape Alliance, in partnership with Ross Creek Landcare and the Australian Plant Society Ballarat, are running a series of programs to educate residents about the importance of shade over creeks and streams for improved water quality, ecosystem resilience, and wildlife protection’.

Over the last 2 years, Kaye outlined some of the achievements of FOTB, including documenting the plight of the Barwon in the book that follows the walkers from “the source to sea”, submissions regarding management our waterways, and with local communities, we have argued against inappropriate development of the floodplains sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Importantly we have increased the profile of the Barwon catchment and, over the last 12 months in particular, have played an important role in developing submissions and ongoing engagement to the Central and Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy; Victoria’s proposed blueprint for an integrated approach to overseeing water use in our region and beyond.

Kaye expressed the sentiment of the whole committee, who are looking forward to seeing our Friends of the Barwon community grow in stature and support in the future. Kaye handed over “the reins” of her role as chair to Trevor Hodson.

Help us spread the word through Social Media

Are you a Facebooker? If so, could you help us expand our reach and input from our community, by taking a couple of minutes to invite your friends to follow our Facebook page. To invite your friends, go to our [FOTB Facebook page](#) either invite all or some of your friends to follow our page. See red mark ups on image below for how to do this:



Upcoming Friends Membership Renewals

Just a heads up that for many of us, that membership to FOTB is due or overdue. To make it easier to co-ordinate and keep a track of membership, we thought it would be easier to try and get most of our membership falling due at the same time each new financial year. We'll be sending around a renewal reminder in late June/early July.

Seeking FOTB Members with Skills

Do you have skills that you'd like to put to great use by helping out our other dedicated volunteers with? There are many ways that you can get more involved so please feel free to ring me, (Liz Hamilton) on 0400 780 680 for a chat anytime with your ideas.

FOTB Contacts

Chair: Trevor Hodson

Deputy Chair: Sarah Brien

Treasurer: Hugh Stewart

Secretary: Stewart Mathison

Spokesperson: Lach Gordon

Committee: Kaye Rodden

Andrea Montgomery

Phil Bade

Peter McCracken

Executive Officer Liz Hamilton, Email: friendsofthebarwon@gmail.com

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