

## Southern Dandenong's Landcare Group 2021

Presidents report by-Rob Pergl

### Groups we support

Southern Dandenong's Landcare Group auspices Birdsland Nature Play group which operates from the Birdsland Environment Centre. The group does a great job in bringing families and the next generation together be involved and participate in their local environment. Thanks to Eliza Lamb

We support the Belgrave Lake Park Group to obtain and undertake grant work along the Monbulk creek. They have done a tremendous job in restoring the riparian corridor with dedicated individuals regularly spending the whole day every week meticulously hand weeding and planting. Thanks Wendy Cross, Helen Pilcher and the team.

Landcare group has just completed the paperwork for a \$5,000 grant for Friends of Belgrave Rail Trail restoring Swan Bend. Thanks, Judy Donnelly, for all her work

We assist Friends of Colby Drive obtaining grant money for restoration work within the reserve. The reserve has undergone a major transformation. When the Landcare group met in 2008 there were masses of Montpellier Broom, Blackberry, Jasmine and exotic grasses. Extensive input of on-ground management has turned the wave of weeds around and returned indigenous understory plants to the reserve contributing to valuable habitat node on the Monbulk Creek. Thanks to Diane Rainbow, Merlin Brown and Liz Conolly.

The Landcare group supports Friends of Minak Reserve Selby where Darcy Duggan began restoration work over 34 years ago. This reserve sits in the upper catchment of the Monbulk creek. It is a demonstration restoration site, providing the first treatment of stormwater run-off filtering excessive nutrients and capturing sediments before flowing into Monbulk creek. Thanks Lesley Wilson, Karen Davies and Liz Conolly.

Friends of Upwey South to the end of last financial year have completed over \$4,000 of in-kind work in the reserve. They've raised the profile of the reserve received support from YRC. Thanks for all the work by Ian Rainbow, Glenda Key and the team.

Landcare group also supports Friends of German Gully, to obtain a grant to undertake work within the catchment of the Monbulk creek. Thanks Sharon McNeil and the team.

We support Friends of Selby Conservation Reserve, pocket of diverse bushland located on Belgrave Hallam rd. Thanks Jackie Glen

Additionally provide support for the Plastic Bag Free Dandenong's Group, Thanks to Ros Baxter and the team.

### Impact of Covid related restrictions

2021 has been another challenging year living in a global pandemic. Lockdowns have almost become a familiar way of life for us now. Most of the on-ground events that we did hold were in-between periods around tightening restrictions. The new delta virus strain of Covid-19 has caught much of Australia by surprise. In many cases the virus has been transmitted much faster than it can be traced. Since our last AGM we have spent close to half the time in lockdown and probably close to all

that time with some level of restrictions. Earlier in the year we enjoyed having no restrictions that enabled us to more active in the community.

### Advocating

The Landcare group continues to play an important part in voicing our concerns about inappropriate development in the Dandenong Ranges. This is an ongoing issue, it's critical that we recognise the unique cultural and natural values of the Dandenong's. We have a responsibility to protect and maintain these values for their intrinsic qualities. All remnant indigenous vegetation throughout the Dandenong's is an asset that needs proper care and maintenance.

Landcare was represented in the upgrade to the Upwey substation. The development was focused on reducing the risk of power surges and therefore potential for bushfire associated with railway line. Community group was formed and advocated to alter the original development for a more environmentally sensitive approach with less native vegetation loss than originally planned. Thanks Ian Rainbow for representing Landcare.

We have been represented in the proposed development of the old Belway motors bus depot on Belgrave main street. The current proposal by proponent Pulitano Properties is proposing a 5-storey development, involves removing 24 trees and changing the streetscape of Belgrave. What we do know is new developments can pave the way for future similar developments. Landcare Group recognises the value of protecting the amenity and aesthetics of the hills. In a similar but different sense Belgrave carpark will be upgraded to accommodate greater provision of parking for commuters. Judy Donnelly provided a submission on behalf of the group. The Landcare group provided a submission outlining similar concerns to protect the hills character. Catherine Keil has been keeping us updated on the Pulitano Development.

### Birdsland Interest Group

Southern Dandenong's Landcare Group along with about 15 other groups and individuals have joined the newly formed Birdsland Interest Group. This group meets quarterly to discuss issues surrounding Birdsland reserve. We are yet to understand the full potential of this new group and its specific role. However, it is an important group for the community to have input in decisions surrounding management of the reserve. The previous committee of management disbanded in 2013 so we welcome a more transparent process around decision making. Birdsland has received a range of upgrades to infrastructure recently these include renovation of the Birdsland Environment Centre, upgrades to tracks including Mt Morton Rd entrance, upgrades to other facilities.

Horse agistment has now ceased within the reserve. Now the grass is alternatively cut and bailed in the lead-up to fire season. Much like the rest of the Dandenong's Birdsland now has Sambar Deer. Relatively recent occurrence, now they are distributed across much of Dandenong's providing challenges to protecting existing indigenous vegetation and establishing revegetation. There have also been wombat sightings around the retarding basin which is a welcome discovery. As we know native animals provide beneficial disturbance in the landscape. This is potentially first wombats back in the area for over 30-40 years.

### Belgrave Rail Trail

The Belgrave Rail Trail has been a key focus for the Southern Dandenong's Landcare Group assisting the Friends of Belgrave Rail Trail. The rail trail features the headwaters starting just above Burwood Hwy a tributary of Hazel Vale gully, part of the Monbulk Creek catchment. This project was started in 2016 when the railway line was managed in ad hoc way. Since then, Landcare and the friends of group have raised profile of the area. With the assistance of Yarra Ranges council and contractors Swan Bend area has been transformed from a weedscape into a demonstration site for restoration, showing what can be achieved and what ought to be undertaken on the south side of the shared use trail.

This project is important, as it is part of a shared use trail that connects to Greater Melbourne region. Usage of the rail trail has anecdotally increased and provided a popular spot for people to exercise during lockdown. Earlier this year we met with YRC to explain our current vision for the trail and discuss our future plans.

### Networking

Despite challenges around meeting in person we have adapted. Landcare continues to network with other environmental groups in the Dandenong's to ensure that we work together and support each other. Some of this mentioned in detail further on.

### Unprecedented storms

The Dandenong's and many other parts of Victoria experienced the some of the worst storm damage on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. Range of factors contributing to this that made the impact worse. This includes the direction and duration of the wind. We experienced wind from the Southeast and East affecting predominantly affecting exposed areas. The rain earlier in day added loading weight to the trees and increased likelihood of falling. This event required an emergency response to deal with the extent of the damage. We closely watched and followed the clean-up as it happened. We monitored the works undertaken to ensure they were not causing additional unnecessary environmental damage.

### SDLG in the Media

We sent out a press release to Ranges Trader and The Age highlighting the need for increased resources to manage natural values in the park. Indicating that the storm was a major stress on the environment that couldn't be controlled and that other stresses like invasive species now need greater attention.

### Meeting with Deputy Premier

Following the event, we sent letter to our local member for Monbulk and Deputy Premier James Merlino and to State Environment Minister Lily D'ambrosio. From this we were offered a meeting James to discuss our concerns. We invited several other conservationists in the Dandenong's sent our agenda and with great surprise they accepted it. We asked the questions about how the logs will be used. Logs from Parks Victoria land cannot leave the Parks estate. All the wood that has been taken out is from roads and roadsides and not PV land. The wood cannot leave the Parks Victoria

estate unless the state environment minister signs an exemption for it to be utilised. We have supported suggestions use wood for habitat values and to prevent illegal four-wheel driving along Sherbrooke Forest firebreaks.

### Events

A range of events that we usually run were cancelled due to covid restrictions including Belgrave Survival Day, Minibeasts festival and Platypus festival.

### Belgrave Lake Park, Discovery Day

The Landcare group co-hosted event with Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenong's (CWAD) in February. This was the final event to mark the end of the \$100,000 grant CWAD received to work along Monbulk Creek. This involved improving environmental values on private land within the Monbulk Creek Catchment. We had a guess the weed competition and a walk and talk looking at the restoration work by Friends of Belgrave Lake Park. CWAD in conjunction with Landcare applied for \$40,000 grant for stage 2 of this project but was unsuccessful.

### Birdsland Bioblitz

We ran the first ever BioBlitz in conjunction with Australian Conservation Foundation local nature campaigner Maggie Riddington. In the leadup to the event we watched eagerly the easing of restrictions. Then the week before entered lockdown 5. Maggie quickly changed the event to a Bioblitz at home where Ian Rainbow, Daniel Kurek, Maggie and myself guided people to observe and record nature at home. The event was held over zoom and was a great success encouraging people to connect to nature during lockdown.

### Grants Completed 2020-21

We've completed paperwork of approximately \$30,000 of grants to undertake restoration works in public land. This required extensive work by our secretary Richard Gipps to track down all paperwork, as we were missing most of it.

### Current work influences future landscapes

I've begun to capture some of local history of the area. We are over time will seek contributions to write up some of the stories associated with conservation movement in the Dandenong's.

### Summary

Hoping to return to on-ground activities if not this year, then next year. It's important to remember that our local landscapes are a result of lobbying and advocating land management agencies and our passion for on-ground management. I want to thank Richard Gipps for his efforts over the past 3 years as Secretary. He came at the right time when several of the Landcare processes needed to be updated. For a period, there was a lot of guesswork where grants paperwork was not handed over. Richard due diligence improved our practices and established proper protocol for Landcare group. Thanks Richard and all the best with your new job. Thankyou Ros Baxter for your work as treasurer. Ros has been involved with landcare since the early days and maybe even the beginning. She has always made herself available to run Landcare stalls at events. Ros has been involved in a broad range of different groups. Thanks Ros and we hope to see you around the traps. Thankyou both.