

Friends of Williamstown Wetlands

President's Report 2017

For a long established – as volunteer environment groups go – such as Friends of Williamstown Wetlands Inc, month-by-month activities go on and although there is little that is really new there is constant need to plant, replant, weed and construct. Life never stands still, and management of the environment, at least of our 'patch' goes on. From time to time, however, we need to turn away from the routine to deal with emerging problems or to make good deficiencies in our operations. We were engaged in two activities of the later type this year, implementing the vegetation management plan for the Jawbone Reserve, and working more closely with Parks Victoria.

It took a few years to get a vegetation management approved by Hobsons Bay Council. This was a landmark achievement but little attention had been paid to the highest priority actions identified under the plan. One of these was to take another look at the Arboretum, enriching the plantings where there had been a measure of success, and considering how to deal with areas where plants refused to thrive. To replant or to replace? Council provided a handsome new sign. The second was appropriate vegetation of areas that had never been adequately addressed, especially on the northern shore of the lake. As the planting season began in 2017 we made a major effort, with Parks Victoria help, to plant on the southern shore of the second lake. So progress was made with both of these, but there is more to be done.

In late 2016 we had a visit from Legislative Council member Colleen Hartland who holds the environment portfolio for the Greens. She was interested in our work and especially in how we interacted with the state government agency Parks Victoria. At a subsequent meeting at Colleen's office we described the changes in staffing level at the Parks Vic Williamstown office. While we understood the reasons for staff deployment away from Williamstown to work in other areas of priority, our work suffered as a consequence. Colleen agreed to take up at Government level the provision of contingency funding in the Parks Vic budget.

The Wader Beach litter project, into which Marilyn and Peter had injected so much effort, came to end in April 2017. The final report was well received by our sponsors – Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group and published by them in their newsletter. Ian made a presentation about the project to a kindred group that we had been in touch with, at Rickett's Point. As in the previous year, a community event was held at the Bayview Campus of Williamstown High School where we were joined by other groups working with litter. As the project came to its conclusion, Nick made a study of gross litter traps in this region, finding that many of them were unattended (never or at least seldom) cleared of litter. The situation was brought to the attention of Council officers, but management of these facilities is probably the responsibility of Melbourne Water. On a hot day in March we hosted a visit by water engineers from the Philippines who had a special interest in litter. Their time in Australia was arranged by Melbourne Rotary, whose representative was likewise surprised to learn of the role of a local environment group and ties to local government and funding agencies.

A feature of the monthly committee meetings are the reports of wildlife in the Jawbone area. This year's reports included a red fox on the sandbar and a cub on the goat track, several rakali sightings, and a little eagle.

Our Clean Up Australia effort was once again organised by Peter and we were once again joined by Williamstown Scouts, Scab Duty, Beach Patrol and Sea Shepherd members who helped us fill the skip provided by Council. A number of our members also joined in the Council's annual outing for environment group members, this time to Woodlands, just north of Melbourne airport, where there is a large (but invisible in the daytime) population of eastern barred bandicoots.

Sandra and Marilyn attended some of the Cultivate Community workshops that were arranged by Council to help community groups improve their skills and, as additional benefit, learn from others how they are going about their business. An example of 'everybody's business' is the concern we have been expressing about dogs of leash in coastal areas where migratory and other bird numbers seem to be falling. Gaining support from the community, and especially dog owners for protection of bird communities is very difficult: advice from Council and from Bird Life Australia has so far not identified actions that can be taken.

Attendances at our monthly work-days have increased and some new members have played important roles in these activities. Following last year's AGM, Karen Manly joined the Committee and together with continuing members helped to make sure that this body functioned effectively. The trifecta of delegated responsibilities, liaison with agencies and sheer hard work gave us another successful year.