

Presidents Report

Annual General Meeting 2020

18th November

Well what a year it has been! We started off with such high expectations, a very successful Christmas break up at the Jones, another well supported rabbit baiting program and plans finalised for promoting our landcare programs at the Geelong Forum in April and supporting the Geelong Landcare Network in hosting the Future Farming Forum in June.

Plans which were quickly shelved as the covid -19 pandemic shrouded every corner of our lives.

Nevertheless our group has stood tall, with our bimonthly newsletter keeping everyone in touch, and our on line messaging through the website and facebook page well subscribed. We continue to receive regular enquiries from landholders for advice about planting guides, weeds and whole farm planning. Whilst it has been easy to manage these in a covid safe way, unfortunately our social activities have had to take a back seat. Hopefully we can celebrate all that the Barrabool Hills community is renowned for in the not too distant future.

Normally I would document all the activities we have organised during the year, but as this is my last report as the group's president, I thought I would document my families journey in landcare, which I hope will shed some light on why community landcare is so vital to the health and well being of our landscapes and also us as individuals.

When we first purchased our property Belvedere in 1991 we inherited land which to a large extent had been forgotten. Whilst the arable land had received attention, the non arable escarpments and rocky barriers had effectively been ignored. These areas housed a thriving rabbit population, were increasingly being infested with box thorn and gorse and wind blown serrated tussock, and to put it mildly were potentially a significant biosecurity threat to our neighbours.

Below:- Brent and Gordon TAFE students half way through hand planting one of the escarpments on Belvedere. Year 3 of the project. White "dots" are tree guards.



Our property was not the only one in this boat and a number of us across the hills felt that if we banded together we could tackle these problems together... and so the Barrabool Hills Landcare group was formed in 1995. May I say from the outset there was little financial help on offer, but what was available was knowledge, support, experience and a shared commitment to leave our landscape in a better state than when we found it.

It is this that has been at the heart of the Barrabool Hills landcare community from the start.

Like many of those who first formed the group, whilst our initial focus was on finding a sustainable way to manage the wicked problems that we had inherited, as our landscapes improved, our vision expanded to include new biodiverse corridors, fencing off the waterways and protecting the dams, looking at increasing perennial pasture and crop cover , whilst all the while keeping

our pest plants and animals in check... now expanded to include a whole range of insidious

introduced tussock like grasses that are almost indistinguishable from native ones! I am referring for example to Chilean needle grass and Texas needle grass.

Our network and support base has expanded significantly over the 25 years. We are the go to organisation when there is a question about sustainably managing our landscape. There is always someone in our landcare community who can help. Those who were part of the initial group, our family included, often forget what our landscape was like before we all started looking at it with a different perspective.

The rolling green hills that so enraptured the National Trust, earning a commendation as a significant regional geological and geomorphological landscape, are now crisscrossed with wide plantations of native species. Providing a haven for native animals, a barrier to wind blown serrated tussock and great shelter for our animals.

Below:- Before(2010) and after(2014) photos of Reardons landcare planting at the "head water" of Merrawarp Creek. Taken from Ballanlea Road looking up Barrabool Road.



Our membership and supporter base is made up of people who want to get their hands dirty as they contribute to a sustainable future, enjoy our social gatherings, seek advice, or just believe in a strong resilient and cohesive community and are willing to support us however they can..... Or all of the above. This year when we needed it most, we received two significant donations towards our programs. I say needed it most because obviously government support has almost dried up but also because such generous acts really boost the spirit of all of us at the coal face... and makes you realise that what you are doing is making a difference.

Every year I reference the incredible job that the entire executive committee has done in maintaining their commitment to our organisation, and this is even more the case this year as our traditional meet and eat meetings have been on hold and replaced by the ubiquitous and very dry ZOOM affairs.

Firstly a huge thank you to our retiring treasurer, Anthony Jones, who has guided our finances for a number of years from a paper based ledger system to one which is now entirely electronic based, with the ability to record and report with the flick of a button. Luckily Anthony has agreed to stay on the committee to facilitate the hand over to the next treasurer.

Thank you to Heike, our secretary, who has really grown in the job and her management of our day to day records and establishment of Standard Operating procedures for a number of our activities will really hold us in good stead in the future.

A reason that our group has continued so effectively during this tough year has been because Tim Harte, our newsletter editor, has stepped up to another level to engage everyone across the community with his great publications and photos. He has not missed a beat for the whole year, even though our sponsorship was on the line for printing and engaging our new federal representative was pivotal... so successful that we are now in colour!

While I am talking about the newsletter, even though over 200 of our friends, members and supporters receive an electronic copy, over 400 are printed, folded and distributed across the hills, to everyone with a mail box on the Leigh's postal run. This opportunity for engagement I believe is one of the main reasons our group and the work we do remains on people's minds, keeps them up to date and makes them feel that they are part of a community. Many of our enquiries for help come from these people, sometimes new residents, but often not, but they are not on our radar in any other guise.

Jim Seager, our Vice president, continues to be an amazing back stop. He is always available to support our projects and enquiries and is an essential part of the team.

Geoff Anson and Maddie Steel have been important contributors to the Geelong Landcare Network

And Trevor Jones continues to house, maintain and manage all our equipment

Whilst the remaining members of our executive don't have particular titles, they have all helped to keep the show on the road. Provide valuable advice, support and importantly before the lock down wonderful food!

I look forward to watching the group grow and expand over the coming years.

Finally an enormous shout out to Brent who drops everything to support me when I need him, and at other times too when I don't know I need him, may I add! Not only does he manage the email data base but he has agreed to guide the website through what has been a difficult phase and we hope that it won't be long before it is fully functional again.

Thanks again to you all for your support.... Here's a photo of the Belvedere escarpment in 2011 to inspire you

Below:- North/East facing escarpment taken from over the Barwon River



Cheers

Kaye Rodd