

Farewell Joe Stephens



Joe Stephens has been acknowledged over a long period of time for his magnificent contribution to Parks Victoria and its operations in East Gippsland. As an environmentalist and even in his role in fire management he has been a major influence both within his profession and with numerous groups covering a variety of interests in the environment.

Many of those who have benefited from Joe's involvement were taken aback recently when he announced that he would be resigning from his Ranger position to become the Manager of Scotia Sanctuary which is part of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

FOGL's relationship began only 4 four years ago. Joe had felt for sometime there was a need for a "Friends" group which would become actively involved in the parks and reserves around the Gippsland Lakes. Late in 2004 Joe was able to draw together a core of interested people to form a steering committee to facilitate the formation of the group that is now known as the Friends of the Gippsland Lakes Parks and Reserves. Since then FOGL has become an established identity in East Gippsland. While maintaining its independence FOGL has combined successfully with Parks Victoria on projects and activities. In saying Parks one should read "Joe Stephens" as it has largely been Joe with his expertise, energy, accessibility, and on-ground participation that has complimented and supported the efforts of FOGL members to achieve success.

While it is with sadness that we farewell Joe we know enough of him and his passion to appreciate that this new venture will provide a great opportunity for him to continue to have an influence in the field to which he has already given so much of himself.

Best wishes Joe from all members of FOGL



What's On

Committee Meetings

Bairnsdale Bowls Club 7pm)
Wed 8th October
Wed 3rd December

Tree Planting

North Arm, Silt Jetties. Mid
October.

Mammal Survey Group of Vic.

Victoria Camp

The Mammal Survey Group of Victoria (MSGV) will be having a camp at Mt Elizabeth over 4 days in early November, from Saturday 1 November through Tuesday 4 November. FOGL members are welcome to attend on any of the days or the entire camp.

Anyone interested in attending, should contact Nancy McMurray on 5156 6756 for details.

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Update is edited by
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Annual General Meeting – David Ellard

The Annual Report presented at the Annual General Meeting held in August has been made available in advance to all members with email. Sixteen members attended with three apologies.

The administration and management of FOGL remains effective because of the very active support particularly from Maurice Burns as secretary and acting treasurer and others, including Bill Cotter, Jenny Dalglish, Peter Johnstone, Nancy McMurray, Wendy Parker, Anne Schmidli and Joe Stephens who have taken the initiative to facilitate special projects.

A highlight of the night was the presentation on Mammal Relocation by Andy Murray which is reported in a separate article.

Newly elected Committee of Management

Executive:

President: David Ellard

Secretary/Treasurer: Maurice Burns

Vice-President : Nancy McMurray
(Minutes Secretary) Wendy Parker

General Committee:

Bill Cotter

Jenny Dalglish

Peter Johnstone

Anne Schmidli

Committee Meeting

At our first committee meeting held on August 27 some discussion occurred regarding the organisation of sub committees and the allocation of tasks. It was agreed that Sub Committees be kept but specific tasks be assigned to individuals within them. and that individuals prepare reports/recommendations and circulate prior to each Committee meeting, as well as providing written motions at meetings.

Subcommittees, Convenors and Specific Tasks

1. Projects, Works and Grants

Convener :Maurice Burns

• No Butts: Anne Schmidli

• Burragarra: Maurice Burns,
Anne Schmidli

• Silt Jetties: Nancy McMurray

• Metung Reserve: Jenny Dalglish

• MacLeod Morass: Bill Cotter

2.Membership, Public Relations and Fundraising

Convener: David Ellard

• Member Profile: Peter Johnstone

• Public Relations: David Ellard

• Newsletter: Jenny Dalglish

3.Activities

Convener Vacant

Assisting :Jenny Dalglish

• Canoe Paddle Bill Cotter

• National Tree Day

4.Issues and Research

Convener Peter Johnstone

• Lakes Forum: David Ellard: Maurice Burns, Wendy Parker

• Green Paper: Wendy Parker

• Shire Enviro Strategy: Wendy Parker
Maurice Burns

Proposed Meetings

The committee will meet every second month.

Meeting dates: October 8, December 3,
February 4, April 1, and June 3

Venue will again be the Bairnsdale
Bowls Club at 7.00pm

Minutes and agendas are distributed to
all members who are welcome to attend
committee meetings

Support, Membership and Recognition

The committee is keen to institute measures to raise the profile of our membership. A survey prepared by Peter Johnstone has been sent to all members to seek your views on some suggested strategies.

Membership fees are now due. FOGL looks forward to your continuing support as a member.

Sub Committee Reports

Projects, Works and Grants

Currently the Project Works and Grants Subcommittee have two grant applications in process, both for the FOGL NoButts! Campaign. This project aims to reduce cigarette butt litter from entering the Gippsland lakes in the vicinity of Paynesville and Eagle Point by encouraging smokers to use strategically placed canisters, by pro-

viding personal ashtrays and by educating the community and visitors of the toxic effect of cigarette butts on the health of the Lakes. If successful the grants will allow for the purchase and placement of canisters, personal ashtrays, stickers, posters and other literature and for publicity. This project has been instigated by Anne Schmidli and Nancy McMurray who both live in the vicinity of Paynesville. They would welcome other members who live in that part of the world who could assist with the rolling out of this project if successful.

Andy Murray spoke inspirationally at the FOGL AGM of the work Southern Ark are doing in far East Gippsland and his keenness to move forward (with FOGL's help) on Project Burragarra and translocating a trial number of Potoroos to Boole Poole. Funding is currently being sought for the trial.

A tree planting day is being arranged for the Mitchell River northern silt jetty for mid-October to continue the work already undertaken by FOGL in that vicinity.

Maurice Burns

National Tree Planting Day

FOGL Members assisted in planting about 2000 plants on National Tree Day on the South Arm of the Silt Jetties. Thanks were received from Planet Ark and organiser Hilary Rigg to our members Maurice Burns, David Ellard, John and Liz Bate, Stuart & Jenny Dalglish, Nancy McMurray, Trevor Caldwell, Margaret Regan, Joe Stephens, Alex Hajkowicz and Peter Johnstone.



Update on the Silt Jetties South Arm

2008 Planting: About 25 plants have needed their guards replaced or fixed as they either blew away or blew over in the recent strong winds we have had. Most of the plants look like they're doing fine, but those very tall (too tall) eucalypt tubes are not doing well, with about 70% of them either dead or dying; they clearly were in their tubes too long.

2007 Planting: Ongoing work continues in this paddock, as there are many, many weeds to be removed and as sheep are getting into this paddock and trampling some of the plants, there are always guards that need to be re-set and plants to be rescued. The sheep also seem to be eating some of the larger plants, particularly the boobiallas and so we are trying to get something done to keep the sheep out of this paddock.

Planting boobiallas along the Eagle Bay foreshore: Planting of around 400 boobiallas along the Eagle Bay foreshore has proceeded to now form a continuous planting along the foreshore to the next private land boundary. They seem to be doing well and we will keep an eye on them, in terms of keeping the guards up and the weeds down. There is also a lot of debris along this foreshore, some from previous plantings (old plastic guards) and some from the recent floods. We will keep an eye on them, in terms of keeping the guards up and the weeds down Mixed species: We have a tray of mixed species tubes, originally for in-fill planting into

the 2007 paddock, and if the sheep can be contained, we will do this in the near future; otherwise, these tubes will be planted along the foreshore behind the boobiallas we have recently planted.

Rubbish removal: Since mid-May we have been regularly removing rubbish from along the silt jetties road, particularly along the top couple of kms, from the composting toilet to the end. In six trips, we have collected equivalent of six large rubbish bags of rubbish, of which about half is recycling. Trevor even pulled an old television set out of the Mitchell River that someone dumped there. We do need to consider what to do about all this rubbish in the longer term – it is a considerable problem.

Nancy McMurray and Trevor Caldwell

Long-nosed Potoroos Pilot Project

Andrew Murray, DSE Orbost, attended the Annual General Meeting to present an update on the re-location proposal. A detailed account of the processes that would be employed was outlined in a previous newsletter (Update Volume 1 Issue 4 December 2006)

The presentation included graphs of recorded observations as part of the Southern Ark Project which indicated the increasing numbers of Potoroos being trapped at

Cape Conran as a result of the successful fox baiting program.

A detailed project brief explaining all facets of the process has been prepared and distributed by Andy who is inviting feedback on the proposal. (Much of this was summarised in the previous article).

The plan is to have four healthy male Potoroos trapped and brought from Cape Conran. Following release, these animals would be radio-tracked every few days to monitor their welfare.

Some further insights were provided in relation to the trial release. While the similarity of the Boole Poole vegetation to Conran has already been documented, concern was expressed about the availability of food sources. Andy was able to explain that the staple diet of the Potoroos was a truffle like fungus which is attached to tree roots. Likely to be found on eucalypts and wattles (but not banksias) on Boole Poole the presence of the fungus would be established as the Potoroos would seek them out in preference to other food (e.g. small insects).

The actual release area would be influenced by this and access for researchers and volunteers would be a consideration.

Andy also explained that if the project is successful the unique location of Boole Poole, would have the potential for other relocations not only from the mainland but as part of species preservation for animals once present but now only found in Tasmania.

Sea Grasses in the Lakes

The plight of the Black Swans in July and associated lack of their natural food source led me to investigate the state of the seagrass meadows in the Lakes, as well as the overall health of the system. Then, Peter Johnstone's email outlining his observations of a reduction in seagrass around Rigby Island seemed sufficient justification for me to include in this edition some interesting information I have discovered. It was carried out 11 years ago but remains relevant to today's situation.

I have included just a short extract, and because the research used aerial photography and clean this up over the summer months. You may find it worthwhile to visit the website, www.dse.vic.gov.au

DSE Gippsland Lakes Seagrass Mapping Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute

Ralph Roob and David Ball November 1997

'The Gippsland Lakes feature extensive seagrass meadows, which are ecologically significant marine habitat, serving as a nursery for juvenile marine fauna as well as providing food and shelter. Four species of seagrass have been identified within the Lakes. They are *Zostera muelleri*, *Heterozostera tasmanica*, *Ruppia spiralis* and *Lepilaena cylindrocarpa*. The depth at which seagrass grows is limited by the availability of light penetrating the water column and reaching the lake floor.

The distribution of seagrass within the Gippsland Lakes is extremely dynamic. There are many environmental parameters, some human induced, others natural that may influence the health and consequently the coverage, of seagrass. Eutrophication, suspended sediments, chemical outfall, oil

spills, sewage effluent, salinity levels and epiphytes are major causes for the continuing change in the distribution of seagrass meadows. Swans and some fish species such as carp can also influence the distribution and density of seagrass.

Eutrophication is the product of high nutrient loads entering the marine environment, usually from waste water discharged from sewerage treatment works and runoff from phosphate fertilised agricultural land.

High concentrations of nutrients cause bloom of algae. Seagrass plants are shaded by these blooms which may be opportunistic phytoplankton or macroalgae attached to the seagrass plants. (epiphytes)

The seagrass can also be shaded by high sediment loads in the water column, usually caused by runoff from newly cleared

(continued from P. 3)

land or dredge spoil.

Eventually the shading becomes so heavy that the plant cannot photosynthesise as rapidly as respire. At this stage, the plant's metabolism is below compensation and it uses its reserves of storage products. Once these have gone the plant will die.'

After reading this, I spoke to Chris Barry of Gippsland Coastal Board to clarify the current situation as seen by the Gippsland Lakes Task Force (key members are CMAs, Coastal Board, water authorities, EPA, DSE and DPI).

They are keen to see the research done in 1997 by David Ball and Ralph Roob repeated, and are negotiating such. Their aim is to improve the water quality in the system, and, whereas in the past assessment was done by physical and chemical means, ecological impacts are now used, with seagrass being of great significance: it is a key indicator of the health of the Lakes and has great value as a source of food and shelter and a nursery environment for marine life. Threatening processes, as previously described, are high sediment and nutrient levels.

The current situation is a result of bush fire devastation of up to one third of the catchment, followed by 1 in 300 year flood event. The largely marine based system was overwhelmed by an influx of freshwater and the response was the processing of the nutrients and subsequent algal blooms. The Task Force is undoubtedly concerned, but as monitoring is usually done by aerial means, the condition and extent of damage to seagrasses has been impossible because of lack of visibility. They are currently investigating underwater video techniques to get an understanding of the problem. Late Spring and early Summer will be the telling times as this

is when the grasses will show signs of growth if they have survived. Chris has promised to keep me informed of any developments.

If the grasses fail to return, what then? Chris feels we will need to wait for nature to take its course; trying to re-establish seagrass has had little success in the past and on a scale of the Gippsland Lakes it would prove impossible.

What can be done is preventative rather than reactive, ie. the management of the catchment to minimise the impact of fire, flood, nutrient and chemical run-off etc., but that's a whole new topic!

After I began researching this topic, I discovered Carmel Egan's article in the Sunday Age (24 Aug) talking with Ross Scott about the state of the Lakes. Check it out online.

Jenny Dalgleish

Member Profile — Maurice Burns

I grew up in various cities and small towns in Victoria, my early boyhood was spent in Mildura. I have vague but fond memories of catching yabbies and fishing on the banks of the Murray River. I think the seeds for a love of the environment were sown then, quietly sitting of a warm evening watching the intricacy and purposefulness of life that depended on and provided for the river.

My adulthood to my mid-40s was spent in the film industry as a location manager finding the places at which films are made. This took me to many diverse places of natural beauty and I eventually realised that any place that was in a healthy biodiverse state was a place of natural beauty.

When I tired of the film business my partner Annie Marshall and I decided to get out of the rat race and live in the countryside at Tambo Bluff. I had often come down to the

Gippsland lakes for holidays and short fishing expeditions and thought of the place as a natural beauty.

In the 10 or so years that I have lived here I have come to think of the Lakes and their surrounds as a natural beauty under threat. One could always move on and set up at the next place of unspoilt beauty but if we all did that then all those places would soon also be under threat. There has to be a better way, a way in which society's natural development tendencies can be brought in to check so as not to be injurious to the environment that, like me, they have come to the Lakes to enjoy. Let's face it, in the last 200 years the Lakes and their surrounds have taken a real bashing from changes in water flow, nutrient inputs, destruction of habitat, animal and plant pest species and unthinking development.

The Gunai/Kurnai people have a strong sense of living in harmony with the natural environment, of being a part of it, they have lived successfully with it for 60,000 years and I believe such an attitude must be forefront in all development decisions if we are not to further degrade our places of natural beauty.

Whenever I am 'in nature' its beauty, power and resilience never cease to amaze me. I like to think that I do as little as possible to disturb the natural flow of things and that some of what I do contributes to the health of the environment. That is why I am pleased to be a member of FOGL and Tambo Bluff Landcare Coastcare; to work towards a balance between development and environmental health so that the environment is not only not further degraded but can recover and regain its state of natural beauty.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS OF GIPPSLAND LAKES PARKS & RESERVES INC.

I.....(name of Applicant(s)) of(address)

Ph. Mb. E-mail(s) desire to become a (state category of membership - see below) member of the Friends of the Gippsland Lakes Parks and Reserves Inc.

In the event of my admission as a member, I agree to be bound by the rules of the Association for the time being in force (can be viewed at <http://fogl.org.au/forms/rules.pdf>).

.....Signature of Applicant Date

Membership fees (to 30 June 2009):

Adult \$20, Family \$35, Organisation \$20, Concession \$10 (Healthcare, Pension, Student)

Please complete Membership Form and enclose membership fee (cheque or money order only) then post to:

The Secretary, Friends of the Gippsland Lakes Parks and Reserves Inc.

P.O. Box 354 Metung VIC 3904