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## President's Report

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## From Your Editors

Our thanks go to Jo Hope, who has so capably done the desktop publishing of this newsletter for the last 3 years. Maurice Burns will now be taking over the role.

For my part, I look forward to continuing regular contributions and welcome any suggestions you may have for specific topics of interest.

Articles for each edition should be sent directly to [editor@fogl.org.au](mailto:editor@fogl.org.au).

Jenny Dalglish

## Organic Farming and the Lakes

Our speaker at the August AGM was Alan Broughton, Vice President of the Organic Agriculture Association. He currently works as the head researcher at 'Strathfieldsaye', the 2000 hectare farm at Perry Bridge. Alan was invited to talk to us about organic farming because what happens in the catchment is of crucial importance to the Lakes environment and agricultural practices are a significant part of this.

'Strathfieldsaye' has 7 kilometres of frontage to Lake Wellington and fantastic natural resources in the form of bush and native grassland. There are current moves to place a conservation covenant on about one third of the farm, to protect these important areas even if the property is sold.

Alan's first and significant point emphasised that there should be no conflict between sustainable agriculture and the environment, and that there now seems to be a greater realisation of this amongst the farming community.

The aim is at 'Strathfieldsaye' is to farm sustainably, investigating methods that are affordable and practical.

There are several different areas where agriculture potentially contributes to adverse environmental conditions in the Lakes.

1. The first are the nutrients which leach through to the water courses and into the lakes. These are mainly nitrates and phosphates, from added fertilizer, manures and from soil that is washed into the water through erosion.

2. Soils and sand from erosion are continually lost especially where paddocks have little or no pasture as a result of over grazing. This has been drastically reduced at 'Strathfieldsaye' where pasture is allowed to recover and is only grazed when it reaches appropriate height. Stock has been changed from sheep to beef cattle and numbers reduced, partly as a result of the drought and partly for research purposes.

3. Floods after drought, of course exacerbate the problem, because of the volume of water.

4. Water courses that are accessed by stock are prone to significant erosion as well as pollution from the constant churning of the mud and defecation.

5. The use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides is highly detrimental, though the use of insecticides is gradually reducing with beneficial insects being brought in to tackle the problem. But herbicides and fungicides are still very widely used, herbicides probably being the greatest contaminant in the Lakes. They are used in vegetable cropping and prior to reseeding pasture. They are long-lived (decades) in the soil. Atrazine and Simazine are widely used and pose risks to the environment. Glyphosate, regarded by many as low risk herbicide, is toxic both to the user and animal life, including life within the soil. These chemicals inevitably reach the groundwater and thus, the Lake system.

6. Hormones and antibiotics from the dairy industry used in birthing and ovulation, also leach into our waterways.

Chances of these problems are greatly reduced with organic farming practices.

Organic farms have far less run-off with more water going into the soil. Restricted grazing means also less soil loss and manure run-off.

- Farmers can:

With fencing, exclude stock from waterways thus reducing erosion, defecation and disturbance of mud.

- Even with the use of chemical fertilizers, there are certain practices which reduce negative side effects, such as using alternatives to urea as a nitrate, sulphate of ammonia being a safer option. Also, applications can be smaller and spread over a period of time (10 lots of 10kg instead of a single application of 100kg.). Out of nitrates put on to farms, a massive 70% goes into pollution!

- Reduce cultivation, which is bad for the soil biology. It should not be required in grazing properties; with organic practices, re-seeding is not necessary. Even with field crops (grains), pasture cropping is possible whereby they are sown

straight into perennial pasture, with just as good a yield once the soil has regained vigour. A winter active crop is sown into a summer active pasture and summer active crop into winter active pasture. There are no examples of this as yet in Gippsland. In vegetable cropping it is more difficult to avoid cultivation.

- Avoid over grazing and maintain ground cover, which also maintains soil life. Reduced stocking is required to adapt to reduced levels of rainfall and adverse effects from major flood events.

- Practice of restricted grazing whereby stock are moved every few days to ensure pasture is not grazed too low. Low growth means shallow root system and limited access to moisture etc. Paddocks can be subdivided with electric fences and thus, grazing can be controlled.

- Reduce use of chemicals to avoid harm to soil organisms and improve soil biology. Introduction of dung beetles has a significant impact on the breakdown of manure into the soil and stabilisation. 'Strathfieldsaye' is introducing 4 different species for all year round activity.

This said, there has already been great improvement in practices during the past 10 years. However, one of the greatest problems farmers face is getting the right information to give them confidence that that they are doing the right thing. Organic agriculture associations are currently their best source.

Alan's talk was highly engaging and much discussion followed, including topics on condition and management of the shoreline, buffer zones, planting of trees and the bare earth that seems to predominate underneath eucalypts, Peter Andrew's theories on organic agriculture and more.

Personally, I came away with a certain amount of optimism; most farmers seem to realise that practices have to change if we are to have a productive and sustainable future in agriculture; the work going on at 'Strathfieldsaye' aims to investigate methods to do just that.

Jenny Dalglish

## Nicholson River Landcare Group

The Nicholson River Landcare Group covers an area from Sarsfield to the Lakes and from Stephenson's Rd to the east to the Nicholson/Sarsfield Road to the west. The main land uses are beef cattle, sheep for lambs and wool, grape growing and lifestyle living. The area attracts listed vulnerable fauna species including the Royal Spoonbill, White-Bellied Sea Eagle, Great Egret and Little Tern. A wetland adjoining the River is the only recorded colonial breeding site in the region for the Great, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants.

The group was formed as a result

of concern for the River environment by the Nicholson River Angling Club. Their passion for fishing and the need for healthy water quality to maintain the resource led them to call a public meeting in April 2004 to encourage landowners adjoining the river to become involved in Landcare activities.

In the 5 years since then there have been several significant achievements, including stock exclusion fencing from the River (at last count on 8 properties), planting of thousands of trees, a rabbit control programme and donation by two members of large

areas of land for Government revegetation projects.

Future direction will see continuation of these projects and also include response and control of pest plants, encouragement of a greater understanding of the importance of waterway management and further development of community awareness and participation.

Of interest too is the fact that Nicholson River Angling Club, in a quest for a healthy river, is also involved in the Waterwatch programme, with monthly monitoring to assess emerging problems.

## Farming on the Edge

I met Jim Stephenson whilst researching information on the Nicholson River



Landcare Group. Jim is President. He generously offered to show me around his farm, identifying how his practices take into account the waterside environment.

The farm is 200 hectares at the mouth of the Nicholson River, with about 2 kms of foreshore to Jones Bay. He is a dry country farmer with usually 1500 to 2000 sheep. The farm has been in his family for the past 100 years. Times are tough for all local farmers at present, with current dry conditions and low wool prices taking their toll. Nevertheless, Jim is continuing revegetation projects and sees sustainable practices as crucial for the future of our farms. He consults with an agronomist for advice on the management of pasture.



Jim has been planting trees on the property for the past 20 odd years, and is the first to admit he made mistakes in the early days, including the use of inappropriate species. For example, many years previously, his grandfather had planted a row of *Pinus radiata* as a windbreak, and as these were thought to be at the end of their days, another row was planted behind them. Not what would have happened today, perhaps,

but the trees (including the tough old

specimens that grandfather grew!) provide much needed wind protection from the strong south westerlies.

Windbreaks of native species have been planted throughout the property, but of great significance is the work that has been carried out along the shoreline and wetland areas. The farm is pre-Torrens title and extends to the lake edge, but this has largely been fenced off stock as have 3 wetland areas. Natural regeneration has taken place but additional planting continues with boobiallas and swamp paperbarks being the main species.

Despite this, increased salinity in the lake system has resulted in dieback and reduction of some species including Black Tussock and Phragmites. These plants maintained the integrity at the lake edge and their inability to survive leads to erosion and loss of foreshore. Jim recalls dense areas of Swamp Paperbark in early years, now much reduced. Without the fencing, however, things could be even grimmer; there are plenty of examples that verify this!

Jim initially joined the Landcare movement as a member of the Broadlands group, but when the Nicholson River group started he joined that. He feels it is difficult to change attitudes and therefore practices within the farming community, but having said that, acknowledges the Landcare Group has had several significant achievements since its inception and estimates that up to 50% of farms fronting the Nicholson between its mouth and Sarsfield are fenced off from stock.



Jenny Dalgleish

Just a thought....

It's easy to forget how much can be achieved by a small group, with limited funds over a period of a year. I've decided that's why we have AGMs, so we can give ourselves a metaphoric pat on the back. The recent FOGL AGM was no exception and I felt a degree of pride to be involved with such an enthusiastic and competent bunch of people. Take a look at the Annual Report to see how much has been done.

However, FOGL is becoming more than that; it's gradually being recognised as a significant force in environmental issues within our region. Not bad considering we have only about 25 financial members! So, as one of those significant 25, see if you can encourage others to join, and don't be left out by forgetting to pay your subs!!

Jenny Dalglish

## Membership Application

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

.....(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 2010):

Adult \$20, Family \$35, Organisation \$10, 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

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