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President's Report

President Wendy Parker

Summer 2013

Happy New Year to all Members. I hope that you have all had an enjoyable and restful time over the holiday period. We could all do with some rain in this part of the world, but having just returned from time on various parts of the NSW coast, rest assured that there are areas not far from here which are happily green and wet!

As part of a new program to help with control of the invasive weed Sea Spurge *Euphorbia paralias* in the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park, on November 20th last year, six FoGL members and 3 Parks Victoria staff took place in the first phase of a weeding program to remove it from sites at Barrier Landing and Rigby Island. This invasive weed was removed from both sides of the coastal track at Barrier Landing, as well as along the lake shore. Follow up weeding at these sites is planned for the autumn and it is hoped that regular twice yearly maintenance will keep it under control, so that it does not become a problem weed in the Park.

Another Sea Spurge weeding took place on February 9 at the Second Blowhole on Bunga Arm (see report). This has been initiated by a member who has been a regular boating visitor to this part of the Coastal Park.

Towards the end of last year, two applications were submitted to Parks Victoria for grants under their Healthy Parks Healthy People program. The applications were for:

1. Rehabilitation, Conservation and Access management on the northern Mitchell River Silt jetties, and
2. Gippsland Coastal Park monitoring and protection of plants threatened by grazing. The application for this latter grant follows on from work done on Boole Poole by David Ellard and Bruce Macpherson of Forestech and has been reported previously.

To date we have received no information as to the success or otherwise of these applications.

The Draft Gippsland Lakes Environmental Strategy was released for public comment in late 2012 and FoGL made a submission to the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Group who are responsible for its implementation. It was heartening to have input from members on this matter as FoGL submissions should reflect member opinion. We have received a written response to our submission and once this is available in electronic form, it will be forwarded to members.

On February 6, the Environment Defenders Office (EDO) and Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA), together with FoGL as co-host, presented a Forum to local environmental groups on the Victorian Government's proposed changes to native vegetation protection (see report). FoGL is a member of VNPA and the Committee was happy to be involved in this joint venture.



Parks Victoria, Bairnsdale, have informed FoGL that they have been successful in obtaining \$50,000 for the eradication of feral pigs from the Boole Poole Peninsula, Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park (see report Spring 2012 newsletter). A strategy is currently being formulated. Both PV and FoGL are delighted that this project will take place.

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Forum on the Victorian Government's proposed changes to the native vegetation laws – 6 February 2013

On 6 February 2013, Yasmin Kelsall from the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) and the Bruce Lindsay from the Environment Defenders Office (EDO) gave a public presentation at Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House on the proposed changes to the protection of native vegetation in Victoria. These changes are detailed in a consultation paper released by the Victorian Government in September 2012 titled Future directions for native vegetation in Victoria (Review of native vegetation permitted clearing regulations). This paper is available on the DSE website. Public comments were invited by 19 October 2012.

The VNPA and the EDO are of the view that the proposed changes reduce the protection provided to native vegetation on private land in Victoria. The current situation and proposed changes as presented at the forum is as follows.



Current Situation

The requirement for a permit to remove native vegetation was first introduced to Victoria's planning schemes in 1989. Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action (NVMF), introduced in 2002, stands as the principal policy for managing Victoria's native vegetation, including the removal of native vegetation. The NVMF sets out the overarching 'net gain objective' which can be achieved when overall gains in the extent and quality of native vegetation are greater than overall losses.

The NVMF included the mitigation hierarchy approach which states that native vegetation removal should first be avoided, if it cannot be avoided, it should be minimised and if a permit is granted for the removal of native vegetation, it should be offset.

Permits are administered through the planning scheme generally by local councils but may be referred to the DSE. Cases can also be resolved through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The competing objectives of the planning scheme and the lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement were raised.

Proposed Changes

The VNPA presented their concerns regarding the four priority reforms proposed in the consultation paper. These are outlined below. A detailed VNPA submission and summary in response to the consultation paper are available on their website.

Priority Reform 1: Clarify and amend the objective for permitted clearing - No net loss in the contribution made by native vegetation to Victoria's biodiversity.

(According to the consultation paper the current objective for the permitted clearing regulations which sits beneath the overarching objective is 'no net loss' of native vegetation.)

The VNPA are of the view that the objective should be to achieve a 'net gain' and that all of the values of native vegetation should be recognised, not just its biodiversity value.

Priority Reform 2: Improve how the biodiversity value of native vegetation is defined and measured - Improvements in mapping and modelling approaches, and the site assessment method and reduced reliance on site assessments and consultants reports for low impact clearing.

The VNPA supports improved research and data collection but does not believe that the spatial data tool, 'Nature Print' used by DSE is currently suitable for use at the property scale and should only be used with the existing assessment criteria and site-based assessments.

Priority Reform 3: Improve decision making - Targeting the mitigation hierarchy to situations where the impact of native vegetation removal is highest. Reduce regulatory burden for the majority of landowners by simplifying the permit process for low impact clearing. (Data from the DSE shows that 90% of the damage done by vegetation clearance is attributed to 10% of permits).

The VNPA is of the view that 'low impact' clearing should continue to be addressed and that the requirement to avoid and minimise should be retained. Allowing this majority of permit holders to move straight to offsetting their clearing with no onsite assessment is considered negligent. Decisions using a risk-based assessment approach should be administered by an independent regulator.

Priority Reform 4: Ensure offsets provide appropriate compensation for the environment - Requiring offsets to closely match the type of vegetation cleared where rare or threatened species habitat is affected, providing flexible offsetting options for permits that have low biodiversity impacts and creating incentives that direct offsets to areas of high strategic biodiversity value for the state.

The VNPA is of the view that the proposed new system opens up the way to clear sites more readily, moving offsetting from being the last resort to the first resort in the majority of cases. Also that this policy may result in the depletion of natural areas in regions that don't have any 'strategic biodiversity values'.

Follow-up

There is likely to be a further round of consultation on the proposed reforms to native vegetation protection. The VNPA will advise local environmental organisations via email when this occurs and urged the audience to get the message across to the broader community and to express their concerns to local members and relevant Ministers.

Lesley Donohoe

Snippets

Macleod Morass Autumn/Spring Planting

It is hoped that this will happen at Mathieson's Paddock, which is rich in birdlife but would benefit from additional plantings. More details once a date is decided.

Silt Jetty Plantings

These are constantly monitored by Nancy and Trevor, with 800 plants in paddock 4 and 18 in paddock 1 being watered using a mobile water tank, ensuring the plants' survival. It's done quickly with a little help from friends, so let them know if you are a willing helper!

No Butts Campaign

Committee members Anne and Nancy continue in their efforts to keep cigarette butts out of our waterways. Anne has been monitoring numbers of butts in 4 Paynesville sites on a weekly basis during the high tourist season. (See photo!) She will repeat the process in the low season. The aim is then to erect 'No Butts' signs and repeat the monitoring process, followed by an assessment of whether or not the signs had been a deterrent.

Illegal Removal of Coastal Vegetation

Concern was voiced by several committee members at the last meeting that this happens too frequently, apparently by residents wishing to improve water

views or water access. It is planned that this be the subject of future discussion and possible action.

Clean-up Australia Day

Litter continues to be a problem around the foreshores but we can all lend a hand on Clean Up Australia Day on Sunday 3rd March. There are sites in Bairnsdale, Paynesville, Eagle Point, Metung, Tambo Bluff, Nungurner and Lakes Entrance. Check the website for contacts www.cleanupaustaliaday.org.au



Getting amongst the Euphorbia!



Five volunteers and two Parks staff tackled Sea Spurge at the Second Blowhole on Saturday 9 February. The task involved pulling new plants following spraying some time ago. Small plants were left to wither; those running to seed were bagged. After a couple of hours work, we were satisfied this site was looking tidy.

We then moved about 300 metres west. Here, things were not tidy at all! Heavy infestations, including some large plants that had to be loosened with a shovel, were located behind the first dune. The remainder of the time was spent pulling and bagging here. The task remains unfinished.

The plan is to tackle these sites again, perhaps in the spring to avoid the task of hauling heavy bags of plants over the sand for removal by boat.

John Pearson

Matt Holland (PV)

Rob Paterson (PV)

John and Ann Schmidli

Gary Wight

Hilary (photos) and John Pearson

GLMAC opportunities

Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee has some funding for Community Groups to co-fund projects which can be demonstrated to "improve" the health (Natural and Social) of the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment.

Any community group within the catchment (up to Warragul) is eligible for small grants to fund special projects. Guidelines can be obtained from GLMAC <http://www.gippslandlakes.net.au>

Pending further discussion, FoGL may apply for funds to augment the pig eradication program on Boole Poole to ensure success.

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 2013):

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

Metung VIC 3904

Membership Application