



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

Number 62 February 2008



Gavin Jennings
Minister for
Environment and
Climate Change

Introducing the new Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Gavin Jennings was appointed Minister for Environment and Climate Change in August 2007 when Premier John Brumby announced his new cabinet. He is also the Minister for Innovation.

Both in his work in Parliament and in his previous role as a social worker, Mr Jennings recognises the value of volunteers in contributing to various causes across Victoria.

“The Brumby Government is proud of the contribution of Victorian volunteers – who contribute their time and skills to make Victoria a better place to live,” he said.

“In Victoria we are lucky that so many volunteers bring a fantastic energy and commitment to important environmental issues which affect our state’s landscape, biodiversity and our future.

“By bringing environmental volunteers together, the Victorian Environment Friends Network is able to achieve significant outcomes in protecting or enhancing specific reserves or species,” he said.

“The selfless work of these volunteers helps us to maintain the high standard of our parks and reserves for the enjoyment of visitors and locals.

“I commend the range of individuals, groups and businesses that contribute to the environmental volunteer movement in Victoria.”

Mr Jennings was born in Melbourne and completed his secondary education at Beaufort

High School. He has a Bachelor of Arts (Monash 1978) and a Bachelor of Social Work (Melbourne 1981).

Before entering Parliament, he had a wide and varied work history, including experience as a Factory Worker, Actuarial Clerk, Actor, Social Worker and Policy Analyst. He also worked as a social worker at the Aboriginal Health Service in Fitzroy from 1981 to 1984.

From 1988 to 1992 Mr Jennings was a Ministerial Advisor to Kay Setches, John Cain and Joan Kirner and from 1994 to 1999 he worked as an Industrial Officer for the Public Transport Union, Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, and the Electrical Trades Union.

Mr Jennings was first elected to Parliament as the Member for Melbourne Province in September 1999, and he became Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and Cabinet Secretary. He was re-elected at the November 2002 State Election and elected to the South Eastern Metropolitan Region at the 2006 State Election.

Mr Jennings was Minister for Aged Care and Aboriginal Affairs from November 2002 until 2007, when he took on his new role as Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Innovation.

“I look forward to working with all Victorians to protect and enhance our State’s environmental assets,” he said.

Special Seminar for Friends: ‘Tilting at Windmills?’

Saturday 19th April, 2008, 9.30 am – 4.00 pm (note change from date advertised in last issue of *FriendsNET*)

Take advantage of environmental and planning laws to protect your patch.

This seminar is presented by the Environment Defenders Office; see details of program on accompanying flyer.

Cost \$10, payable on arrival (includes refreshments, but BYO lunch)

Bookings are essential (numbers are strictly limited) : contact EDO at 8341 3100, edovic@edo.org.au



Maelor Himbury
(Friends of Maribyrnong
Valley) Network
Committee Convener
9374 1902 (h)

From your Network Committee Convener

Welcome to 2008, the International Year of the Potato and the Chinese Year of the Rat. (Ratatouille and chips, anyone?) It's sure to be an interesting year with a new government in Canberra and the prospect of a whole new direction in America.

On the local scene there are still plenty of weeds to clear (I've just come in from removing one small patch from my garden) and battles to fight with councils, developers and government instrumentalities.

This is why we have scheduled a seminar this year on how to use the law to protect your local

environment. Arrangements have been made with the Environment Defenders Office to take you through the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and the Victorian planning regulations.

The Seminar is to be held on April 19 at the Melbourne/South Yarra Senior Citizens Centre. For details, see page 1, and the flyer accompanying this newsletter.

After the last VEFN General Meeting, four vacancies remained on the Committee. One of these has been filled by the cooption of Thelma Christensen of Action Sweetwater Creek.

Groups in action



Robert Bender
- coordinator of Friends
of Wilsons Reserve

Friends of Wilsons
Reserve in action

Friends Groups are autonomous and independent, and this means there is great variation in the way they operate. Robert Bender reports on Friends of Wilson Reserve.

I had been doing some regular weeding on a very degraded section of the local bushland reserve bordering on the Ivanhoe golf course. The Banyule Council announced a land swap, resuming one fairway to establish some ponds in exchange for my weeding area. I was annoyed and wrote to the local paper. The Council got in touch and proposed I start a Friends Group. Lincoln Kern, then the Banyule volunteer coordinator, organised a public meeting, which we both addressed, he letter-boxed around the neighbourhood, 25 people turned up and we agreed to start work the following month, which was May 1996. We have had monthly working bees ever since, and taken on Frogwatch, Waterwatch, monitoring bats, fungi, flying foxes, etc. and I have extended to the local park cutting embankment, and Ivanhoe rail station.

Nearly all members have either stopped to chat with me while out walking, or found us via some website, usually Banyule's. A few have brought along their friends. There are now about 15 fairly reliable participants who attend some working bees and 2-3 sharing responsibility.

We have helped revegetate about 10% of the 40 hectare reserve; done heaps of watering through drought times; surveyed birds, frogs, fungi, flowering shrubs and herbs; collected litter (e.g. on nine Clean Up Australia days); notified the Council staff of various problems, such as fallen trees over pathways or vandalism; lobbied for Melbourne Water to fix drainage issues; contributed to Council enquiries into things like open space, weed controls, storm water, dogs in parks, etc.; contributed to the wildlife atlas, fungi distribution maps, etc. I have also worked on the history of the reserve.

We have received a few small grants, for bat boxes and the Waterwatch kit and microscope, but mainly work at zero cost, have no membership fee, constitution, committee or legal structure. All effort (apart from the newsletter) goes into on-ground work. We have no insurance and rely on Banyule's volunteer compensation cover. We've never had a claim.

You could describe me as a 'self-appointed' leader. That's fine while I'm fit and healthy, but we have no succession plan. The future depends on people who are prepared to take responsibility and able to handle it well.

Is incorporation necessary to obtain grants?

For a group to be eligible to receive a grant from funding bodies such as government agencies and philanthropic associations they probably need to be incorporated, or make arrangements with another incorporated association to auspice their application. However, Friends Groups do not need to be incorporated to receive a Parks Victoria Community Group Grant as there is no transfer of funding to the group. Parks Victoria will pay for the initial incorporation costs for new Friends Groups working predominantly on Parks Victoria estate.



Experience Exchange (your space)

Sue Wright of Friends of Woodlands Historic Park and VEFN Committee Member has more to say about working with children:

To accept an unaccompanied child working with you is to accept the Duty of Care for that child. It can be a minefield of unexpected situations. In the cold hard light of the Supreme Court, is the Duty of Care lying with the whole Friends Group or is it with the kind-hearted soul that said 'leave the children - I'll mind them' - or with both? Should we perhaps ask that a responsible adult remain on site while we engage the children, inspire them, guide them, tell them what great kids they are, shake their hand, and wave goodbye? Adults usually want their personal space respected, and so do children. A handshake maintains personal space and is an accepted way of thanking someone. Kids like to feel they are growing up, and a handshake is so much more 'mature' than a hug, and to hug a child - when they are not a close friend or relation - is open to misinterpretation. It may seem harsh and unnecessary, but it is the most responsible way to work. You should not lose sight of the fact that you have a Duty of Care to yourself. You (and your family) deserve it, your Friends Group deserves it, and the community we serve so well will understand.

Sjaan Field, Volunteer & Community Programs Coordinator with Parks Victoria, brings us up to date with the Working with Children Policy.

Parks Victoria has completed its draft of the Working with Children (WWC) Policy. The Policy and a Frequency Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet will be available at Parks Victoria work centres when complete.

A WWC check is only necessary where volunteers are involved in regular, direct contact with children (under 18 years of age) and contact is not always directly supervised by another adult, who is specifically undertaking child-related activities in a primary role. Other roles such as Education Officers and Rangers are required to have a WWC Check.

On the matter of physical interaction with children, the WWC Act does not specify guidelines for physical contact. The Child Safety Commission, www.ocsc.vic.gov.au, raises several dot points within its Guide for Creating a Child-safe Organisation that directly relates to physical contact, for example:

- Do not initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that children can do for themselves.

It is Parks Victoria's recommendation that volunteers and staff are aware of their physical

interaction with children and always maintain and encourage a caring, respectful and professional approach. There should always be a responsible parent/guardian present at all activities and at no time should a child be left in a volunteer's primary care. Friends should only provide education/information and instruction to children and not take responsibility to care for a child.

* * * * *

In our last issue (Nov. 2007) we asked for ideas on the best way to get a message across. Bob Reid and Judy Douglas of Friends of the Werribee Gorge & Long Forest Mallee have responded to our request:

To help promote seminars and conferences, the VEFN committee could prepare a synopsis, 'promo' or press release in Word format for inclusion in the local Friends newsletter. The press release should promote the conference. Once Friends in a group know that the conference or seminar is on, what would motivate them to go? To brag about their group? To present a new idea? To speak about something that they have learnt? To learn a new skill? To hear an expert who has done research in a field relevant to their park? To see what other groups are doing? To have a day or weekend of fun? To visit a new site? To rekindle their passion for Friends projects? To collect new ideas? To promote an idea? To promote their area? To skill-up new young members? To catch up with Friends? To attend the Saturday night party? To compete in the Friends Olympics and come home with a medal? To develop a network? To be inspired?

Friends groups are more than work. Having fun, enjoying company and sharing skills and knowledge are also part of what we do!

The *Herald Sun* has 50/50, the *Age* has 'And Another Thing...' and now *FriendsNET* has 'Email Response' for you to email your Experience Exchange crisp comment to friendsvic@hotmail.com

This month sees a continuation of readers' opinions related to Friends groups working with children. And there has been a response to the issue we raised last month - how we might improve our communication.

We would still like to hear more on this latter topic in particular.

Share your questions, experiences or ideas - contact a Committee member (see page 4)

How the hours add up

The Parks Victoria 2006-07 Annual Report tabled in Parliament states:

In 2006-07 volunteers contributed over 177,000 hours of voluntary work: 58% of the volunteer contribution focused on natural resource management projects, 30% on visitor service related projects and 11% on cultural, values management. Friends groups are the largest group type to volunteer across Parks Victoria, contributing 40% of all volunteer hours.

How to contact us ...

By post:

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By e-mail:

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home.vicnet.net.au/~friends

Group Grapevine

Another two groups have received Parks Victoria 25 years Service Awards – Friends of the Great South West Walk and Friends of Brisbane Ranges NP.

Friends of Brisbane Ranges NP report that a Photograph Exhibition held in conjunction with their Wildflower Show attracted 13 photographers with over 30 entries and resulted in sales. Bus tours of the park were very popular. For their Wildflower Show, Friends of Kooyooora organised a popular 'Self-drive Wildflower Tour'.

The 2008 Calendar produced by the Victorian High Country Huts Association is now available – phone David Oldfield 9747 1411

Friends of Glen Fern Valley Bushlands have arranged free coffee vouchers from three cafés for all working bee attendees.

Many groups have a logo and we know of one with a motto. Friends of the Prom have asked members for suggestions for a new logo. Earthcare St Kilda's motto is: 'We do what we can where we are'.

Incorporated in May 2007, Jacksons Creek Eco Network Inc. (JCEN) is a coalition of nine Landcare and Friends Groups along Jacksons Creek and its tributaries. The network has obtained four grants, produced a newsletter, held tours of inspection, and made submissions to relevant authorities regarding willows, water extraction, erosion and a proposed road that could affect Harpers Creek which runs into Jacksons Creek. The Secretary is Terry Lane 9364 3587.

For some years Moonee Ponds Creek has had a coordinating group – The Moonee Ponds Creek Coordination Committee (MPCC). Members include the cities of Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Moreland and Hume, as well as the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek. Grants have enabled this group to employ staff. The coordinator is Heather Holder 9333 2406.

And while on creeks, mention must be made of the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) established in 1989. Funded by its member councils and grants, it has management responsibilities and employs staff, including a works crew. Contact 9380 8199. See report in FN45 (Nov. 2003).

Vale Bill Goodall

We belatedly record the death on 28 November 2006 of Bill Goodall at the age of 85 years. Bill was the recipient of a 2006 Best Friend Award. He formed the Friends of the Point in 1989 and did remarkable work on track construction and clearing sand from fortifications at Point Nepean.

And we welcome ...

Friends of Strathnaver Reserve

Strathnaver Reserve is on the Moonee Ponds Creek at Strathmore Heights. The group advocates for and maintains the site, including rare plants. Judy Allen 9306 7154

Friends of Melton Botanic Gardens

The group is working to enhance and conserve an area within Town Centre Park which includes an indigenous section along Ryans Creek with the goal of developing a botanic gardens. John Bentley 9743 3819

Friends of Wallace Reserve

A public bushland reserve in the Heatherhill Rd area of Frankston. The group aims to control noxious weeds, revegetate, and help promote community awareness. David Cross 0427 545 490

Friends of Bald Hills & Kings Flat Reserves

The Friends aim to increase public awareness of these reserves, conserve and enhance the flora and fauna, and develop knowledge of the indigenous history of the area. John Brandenberger 5663 2362

FriendsNET may be downloaded from the Network web site (home.vicnet.net.au/~friends) and emailed to group members. Articles in FriendsNET may be used in Group newsletters with acknowledgement.

Some Useful Contact Numbers

Crime Stoppers: 1800 333 000

Emergencies: fire, police, ambulance – 000

EPA Pollution Watch Line: 9695 2777

Injured Wildlife (Wildlife Victoria):
0500 540 000

Melbourne Water Emergencies: 13 2446

Parks Victoria: 13 1963

Poisons Information Service: 13 1126

State Emergency Service: 9696 6111

Supermarket Trolley Hotline: 1800 641 497

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If undelivered, return to:
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CARLTON 3053

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