



12th Biennial Friends Conference Rawson Village 7–9 September 2007

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF SELECTED SECTIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

PLEASE NOTE: This is a greatly abbreviated summary, and the notetakers trust that they have not misinterpreted or misrepresented any of the speakers' information or opinions. Any enquiries concerning any of the segments can be directed to the Friends Network Committee, c/- VNPA.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Barrie Pittock gave a comprehensive analysis. Climate change is happening faster than anticipated. Uncertainties, due both to future human behaviour and to the uncertainties of science, are large. We need a risk-management approach with policy for the high end as the risks are great.

Comparing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Third Assessment report of 2001 with the Fourth Assessment report of 2007 gives some idea of how things are changing. Something like 4 and 5 degree global warming is the difference between the last ice age to the present. A similar change is occurring over perhaps a hundred years instead of ten thousand years. The IPCC prediction of 18–59 cm sea level rise this century leaves out ice melt acceleration. Dr Pittock forecasts at least 1 metre by 2100.

The reasons for climate change happening faster than expected:

1. The planet's sensitivity to the doubling of CO₂ is high.
2. Cooling by particulates is lessening due to cleaner air in Europe and North America.
3. Permafrost melting in Alaska, Canada, Northern Europe and Siberia.
4. Biomass feedbacks are locking in – heat stress, fires, decomposition of humus.
5. The Arctic sea ice is retreating. The ice reflects sunlight. If it melts you get more sunlight absorbed by the water, increasing the rate of warming, reducing the amount of ice, with an amplification effect.
6. Changes in air and sea circulations.
7. Antarctic & Greenland ice melt. Ice shelves are breaking up and outlet glaciers are retreating.
8. Draining of swamps in high latitudes. When peat dries out the danger of fire that releases huge amounts of carbon dioxide.

In Australia the forecast is for greater aridity in the south-east, with many and diverse impacts. Temperature rises will be milder around the coasts, and very high in the northwest of WA. The rainfall prediction is for big decreases in the south west of WA and western Victoria, and increasingly severe monsoons in Arnhem Land.

What to do about it?

- Adapt to what is unavoidable. Prevent what cannot be adapted to.

- We need at least 80% decrease in emissions to stabilise world climate. We need stronger agreements that include India, China and Brazil.
- In coastal areas we must monitor erosion and sand drift and organise a planned retreat inland. Expensive coastal walls, storm levees will not protect coasts for long.
- For water supply we must develop policies on conservation, reuse and desalination, using renewable power.
- Erosion control – shelter belts, contouring of farms, fire management, no ploughing.
- Reduce the stress on ecosystems and link climate zones (create more and wider corridors) and set up gene banks.
- To control eutrophication we must reduce nutrient inputs that get washed into rivers.
- Water tables are lowering so we must reduce water usage to recharge aquifers.
- Retreat altitudinally is not an option in Australia as it is too flat.

A website floodfiretree.net has a Victorian coast map to help people model various sea levels.

WATER

Professor Nancy Millis was on a Victorian Government committee that produced a report on our needs for water and what to do about it. There is no one solution.

77% of Victorian water extraction goes to irrigation, 8% to Melbourne and about 9% to rural cities and towns. In Melbourne, 60% is used by householders, about 26% by big industry and about 14% by small industries.

In Melbourne households, before restrictions, 35% was for gardens, 26% baths and showers, 16% laundry, 19% toilet and 5% kitchen. Of this 5% we probably drink only 1.5 to 2% per head, so 95% is used in ways we should look at.

With increasing population and lower rainfall we now need more water. There are two ways to increase supply – desalination of sea water and treating sewage effluent so it becomes usable for another purpose.

Industries have been required, in consultation with their supply authority, to do a water audit of how they can conserve water and reduce their wastewater discharges. There are many ways to recycle water within industry.

Sea water has 35 grams salt per litre, effluent has only about 0.8 to 1.2 grams but also about 1% organic materials. Effluent from treatment plants contain pathogens with a potential for viral, bacterial and protozoic parasites to be present that are not in sea water. So even treated effluent has the 'yuk' factor, which has been exaggerated. More seriously, pharmaceuticals, detergents,

antibiotics and endocrine disrupters are present in effluent, although the concentration of endocrine disrupters particularly is really extremely small. Organic chemicals and compounds from industry are also not totally removed. Heavy metals are likely to be higher in effluent than in sea water but conventional treatment of sewage takes out most heavy metals.

To raise the quality of either seawater or treated effluent you use a high pressure reverse osmosis membrane process that is very power-costly. Power for desalination is much higher because of the higher concentration of the salt. Both processes are dependent on the integrity of the membranes. The answer is good processes that are carefully monitored with separate modules which can be isolated. For safe potable water you must have multiple barriers and, after full treatment, ultraviolet and chlorine disinfection because it is possible that some organic material will pass through the final osmosis. Most commonly the water is then added to an existing supply. Professor Millis is fairly confident it is a safe supply, especially if you can put it in a reservoir where purification continues by natural means. Before doing any of this you must consult with consumers.

The water from a Wonthaggi desalination plant will have to be pumped to Cardinia, which is very expensive. Purified effluent would be nearer the population with less distance to pump.

There is the possibility of genetic engineering being extremely useful. Complete sequencing of genomes of plants is now feasible. Plants have developed mechanisms for surviving in low rainfall areas and if we can isolate the genomes for those genetic characteristics we can incorporate those into other plants. Similarly for salt tolerance. It has been done for frost tolerance. It could also be done to hasten when plants flower to get them through before the hot weather.

'VICTORIA NATURALLY'

John Sampson of 'Victoria Naturally' spoke on this alliance of eight environment groups led by the Victorian National Parks Association created to tackle the state's growing biodiversity crisis. More than 70% of Victoria has been cleared: on private land the figure is more than 90%. This has had devastating impacts on our wildlife, leaving nearly a third of our animals and close to half our native plants extinct or threatened with extinction. The State Government has responded to the alliance's concerns by launching a Land and Biodiversity White Paper inquiry. A two-year process, the White Paper will prioritise policy and investment in land health and biodiversity for the next 20 to 50 years. A discussion paper drew over 350 submissions, with more than 30 from Friends groups. The next stage, the release of a Green Paper, which is a draft of the final White Paper, will be open for public comment. He encouraged all Friends groups to comment. All submissions to the discussion paper can be found on www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse, click on the 'Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change' link.

To keep up to date join Victoria Naturally's free monthly bulletin. Just email your name to info@vnpa.org.au. To find out more about Victoria Naturally go to www.vnpa.org.au and click on the Victoria Naturally link.

WORKSHOPS

Delegates had the opportunity to attend two workshops.

Digital Photography – facilitated by Bob Reid

1. Photography is useful for group photos, team building, reflection on work done and achievements.
2. Digital photography is useful for monitoring projects, photo-points, illustration and grant applications before and after projects.
3. Digital cameras are the new photocopiers and useful for research.
4. Archiving photos becomes a bigger problem – be sure to have backup, dates on files, printout and access to photos over time.
5. Camera and screen resolution is 72 dots per inch (dpi), printing requires 300 dots per inch. Be sure to convert!
6. There are issues of rights to photograph people, possibly use permission forms. Copyright to work still applies. Acknowledge your photographers!

Other topics covered included resolution, optical and digital zoom, macro and compression.

Newsletters – facilitated by Judy Douglas

1. WHY – To acknowledge, advertise, archive, educate, inform, involve, promote, record and inform.
2. WHAT – Articles, photos, plans, reports, Ranger/administrator space.
3. WHEN – How often.
4. HOW – Letter/note, brochure, the complete work, team or individual, distribution by snail-mail/email/web site.
5. WHO – target audience, receives copies, responsible, writes, layout, photocopies/mail out.
6. The involvement of the group in the writing, deciding content, taking photographs etc. is an excellent Group building exercise.
7. The completed newsletter should reflect the inclusive, active, environmentally responsible individual nature of each particular group.
8. Newsletters can become a monument to the person producing it. This usually results in no-one ever being prepared to contribute or take over the task!

VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal) – facilitated by Brendan Sydes (Principal Solicitor, Environment Defenders Office)

1. The Environment Defenders Office provides advice and legal representation, pushes for change to improve laws and engage in community education. Office is in the 60L Green Building. Happy to be involved with Friends groups.

2. The Victorian Planning & Environment Act 1987 applies to both public and private land, but the Minister for Environment is exempt from Planning Schemes. In other cases of public land (e.g. Council owned land) management of that land does not require a planning permit.
3. The Act recognises 'persons affected'. Standing is not an issue. If you have an interest you can lodge an objection with the Council, and objectors typically can appeal to VCAT. An Incorporated Association is a legal entity, but VCAT will also recognise unincorporated associations.
4. VCAT flexible in type of evidence it will accept. VCAT has to provide a statement of reasons for decisions.
5. VCAT can enforce Council permit decisions, and VCAT decisions. VCAT can order costs against a party – very unusual. If an incorporated association, it bears a costs order, not the individuals. VCAT is more ready to award costs against a party to an unsuccessful enforcement order. A letter to the Council first may get action and is protection against costs. Success may mean getting better conditions.
6. An Appeals Kit is available through the EDO Web site.

Weed Maps – facilitated by Sean Carter

1. Weeds of National Significance (WONS) are very large problems.
2. Assess weed abundance and distribution to learn what is there, where it is, when it is a major problem, the trends and seasonal patterns. What new weeds are emerging? Are there changes in density and area of cover? How effective are management practices?
3. Know your weeds: what time of year is best to tackle each species? Are they annuals or perennials, evergreen or deciduous, bulbous or grown from seed?
4. Weeds should be monitored in their peak season: fast-growing weeds need reassessing often (such as Serrated Tussock). Slow growers can be assessed at intervals of years (such as Willows). An assessment sheet was distributed, along with a page of plot patterns used to assess density of weed problem in a plot of any selected size.
5. Mapping: can help set priorities for on-ground works, help in applying for funding. Can check to see if controls are effective.
6. Photo points, before and after treatment, are valuable. Use a star picket with a yellow cap to identify the photo point.
7. Use available websites to get needed information:
 - weeds.crc.org.au for a list of WONS
 - affashop.gov.au offers a field guide for WONS
 - weed.org.au/docs/weed gives a manual for weed control methods, including the method for assessing density-classes
 - dpi.vic.gov.au has a range of .pdf files on each WONS species

SATURDAY EXCURSIONS

Morwell National Park - led by Ken Harris of Friends of Morwell National Park.

Tyers Park – Led by Jim Stranger of Friends of Tyers Park and Leon Costermans.

Baw Baw National Park – Mushroom Rocks – Led by Friends of Mt Baw Baw National Park.

Mt St Gwinear – led by Susan Luscombe of Mt St Gwinear Ski Patrol.

Walhalla – Bus provided by Parks Victoria – led by Ranger Andy Gillham and Brian Brewer of Walhalla Heritage & Development League.

SUNDAY SOAPBOX – chaired by Bernie Fox

Sue Wright said that based on the experience of Friends of Woodlands Historic Park, groups should be wary of leases to private operators.

Joan Lindros said Friends were a formidable force for conservation but were not fully utilised. That force could be magnified if we spoke with one voice. To be more strongly affiliated with VNPA would be a strong step forward.

Robert Bender referred to the state of the Yarra and the cut in environmental flows. We should act collectively to protest.

Carol Clarke said the Network and all friends Groups should approach all MPs about climate change.

BIENNIAL GENERAL MEETING

The Convener, Maelor Himbury, reported on the two years since the 11th Conference. Treasurer Sue Wright presented the Financial Report. As at 30/6/07 there was a credit of \$2649.50.

The Constitution was amended to change the name of the Network from 'Friends Network' to 'Victorian Environment Friends Network'.

Five members of the 2005–07 Committee – Margaret Boyd, Sean Carter, Geoff Durham, Jenny Harrington and Judy Hindle – did not seek reelection. Bernie Fox, Maelor Himbury, Tony Woolford and Sue Wright were reelected. This leaves four vacancies. The committee has power to co-opt to fill these.

In relation to the document, 'The Role of the Victorian Environment Friends Network Committee', it was resolved: 'That the Committee consider the introduction of another clause in the role statement document which will facilitate information dissemination on broader environmental issues. To enable Friends Groups to achieve more effective conservation outcomes, liaison with the VNPA will be an integral component of the process.'

A motion of appreciation for **Geoff Durham's** 'amazing dedicated commitment to the VEFN over many years' was carried by acclamation.

2007 BEST FRIEND AWARDS

The 2007 Best Friend Awards were announced on 9 September at the 12th Friends Conference at Rawson. Five of the nine recipients were present to receive the Award from Professor Nancy Millis, a member of the Award Panel. They were Judy Douglas, Graeme Hume, Frances Overmars, Bob Reid and Alan Trevorrow.

Judy Douglas, a foundation member of **Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee** formed in 1984, has continually served on the committee and been involved in all its activities. Many articles have been produced, and Judy has worked with Robert Reid on the publications 'The Mallee at the Back Door', 'Jack's Track Notes' and 'Birds of the Long Forest'. Judy has also been involved in other conservation activities and with the Friends of Wyperfeld.

Graeme Hume has been a member of the **Friends of the Great South West Walk** for an extraordinary 26 years – 15 years as President. He encouraged the adoption of the proposed Great South West Walk as a student project in 1980. He has spent many hours working to establish and maintain recreation with preservation around the volunteer-built 250 km walk. He is a key person in the success of the group.

Frances Overmars was President of the **Pinkerton Landcare and Environment Group** from its inception in 1992 and is now Project Coordinator. The group manages 100 acres including Bush's Paddock and Pinkerton Forest, the heritage Farm of Pinkerton, Cobbledicks Ford Reserve and connecting Werribee River frontage. Frances is a most enthusiastic member, and a driving force of this group in working with the Melton Shire Council and Western Water.

Robert Reid was a foundation member and the first Coordinator in 1984 of **Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee**, and as a continuing committee member he has filled many roles. Robert and Judy Douglas played major roles in the production and distribution of 'The Mallee at the Back Door', 'Jack's Track Notes' and 'Birds of the Long Forest'. Robert is also involved in the Friends of Wyperfeld and the Grow West project.

Alan Trevorrow has been a vital member of the **Friends of Nyerimilang** for more than 20 years. He became Treasurer in 1988. He has instigated many large projects and been involved in every aspect at the park as a hard working, enthusiastic team

member, including environmental and heritage works. Alan uses his skills as a builder and teacher to organise and run special community days.

Best Friend Awards were presented to **Howard and Marie Hodgens** by Anna Burke MHR for the Federal seat of Chisholm and Bob Stensholt MLA for the State seat of Burwood on the 9 September 2007 in a moving ceremony on Wattle Day at Wattle Park. Anna Burke described Howard and Marie as 'the living treasures of Wattle Park'.

As President, Howard, who joined **Friends of Wattle Park** in 1994, has been a mainstay of the group. He has been involved in all the usual activities – weeding, planting, propagating and seed gathering, and special heritage projects. Among his many achievements is the development of a special weeding tool.

Marie has been the Secretary of Friends of Wattle Park for many years since she joined the group in 1995. She has been very active in keeping the communications under control. Howard and Marie have worked to apply successfully for grants, edit the newsletters and organise group activities.

Sue Course was a foundation member of the Rockbeare Park Conservation Group, the forerunner of the **Darebin Parklands Association**. In 1973 Sue mobilised her neighbours and has succeeded in turning a degraded former quarry and tip into one of Melbourne's best urban bushland reserves. Sue has served in many roles and remains an active committee member. The presentation of the Award will take place on 25 November.

Cyril Curtain was one of the founding members of the **Friends of Brisbane Ranges National Park** in October 1982. He has been a very active participant in all activities. He was an outstanding contributor on the committee for the publication of 'Wildflowers of the Brisbane Ranges'. He has been on the committee organising special events such as the annual flower show at Anakie. The presentation of the Award will take place on 9 December.

Nominations for the 2008 Best Friend Award close at the end of this year (Dec. 2007). If your group is more than 10 years old and you have a member who has both made an outstanding contribution and shown exceptional dedication consider nominating that person for this prestigious Award. Download a nomination form from our web site – home.vicnet.net.au/~friends or pick one up at the VNPA office.



Judy Douglas, Alan Trevorrow, Frances Overmars, Robert Reid, Graeme Hume, Prof. Nancy Millis (front)



Marie Hodgens, Howard Hodgens



Sue Course



Cyril Curtain