

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

VNPA PRESIDENT RUSSELL COSTELLO

My first year as President began last year, the VNPA's 60th anniversary. It has been a difficult but successful year for the organisation.

I took over as President from Fred Gerardson, and am very grateful that during his five-year term he managed a total revamp of the VNPA's governance and policy structure, and left me with a vibrant and capable Council. I also thank VNPA Director Matt Ruchel for helping me adapt to the role.

This has been a year when funding has been tight and there has been so much to do and defend. The Council has particularly thanked Matt and his staff for their special efforts and for the sacrifices they have made this year.

And of course we could not have achieved a great deal of what we have accomplished without the dedicated input from many volunteers and supporters. I pay special tribute to all the members of the Council and its committees, to the volunteers who work in the office, and those who work on the VNPA's campaigns and its many activities.

And we couldn't do anything without our supporters. It has been a difficult year financially for many of our major donors, but most have stuck with us and we are very grateful.

To those of you who have taken up the new membership option to donate \$25 per month or more, including membership, you are helping to give us a reliable income so that we can better plan our activities in campaigns. Regular giving helps your organisation and the Council to be less reliant on guessing what we may receive at the end of the financial year.

So I encourage anyone thinking about changing their membership to this option to give it go. However, we are always grateful for any donations, and particularly your continued support for our special campaigns.

Some years we make great steps forward in conservation. This has been mainly one of defending what we have. We have had threats of grazing, logging, fossicking and commercial development in our national and other parks.

One of the biggest threats has been the State Government's push, through its tourism policy and legislation changes, to get private tourism developments within our national parks. The government wants to start with a hotel in Point Nepean National Park. This triggered our 'Hands off our Parks' campaign.

I can't emphasise enough the danger of the government's new 99-year commercial leases for national parks and other reserves. They are virtually the equivalent to privatising land. In Canberra, private housing is on publicly-owned land under 100-year leases that are bought and sold like normal private blocks.

Any private hotel or resort in a park would be a kick in the face to the local towns and tourism providers who rely on the drawing power of these reserves. Our policy of encouraging development outside national and other parks means we have a common goal with these providers in their role of facilitating visits to the parks without destroying their natural beauty.



PHOTO: GEORGIA KERR, PARKS VICTORIA

With the new government in Canberra, it is critical that we strive to make national parks truly national with protection under Commonwealth environmental legislation from the continuing threats to them posed by the State.

We are also preparing for a future time when the state government may be more amendable to doing something positive for the environment, rather than going backwards.

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

**President:** *Russell Costello* (Executive, Conservation).

**Vice President:** *Maelor Himbury* (Executive, Education & Events, Membership & Marketing).

**Secretary:** *Charles Street* (Executive; Conservation; Governance, Policy & Legal).

**Treasurer:** *Gary Allan* (Executive, Finance).

*Ann Birrell* (Executive; Conservation; Governance, Policy & Legal) – approved leave of absence Feb-Oct 2013.

*Russell Bowey* (Executive, Bushwalking & Activities Group).

*Andrew Dodd* (Membership & Marketing).

*Deborah Henry* (Education & Events).

*Kyle Matheson* (Finance).

*Heather Macauley* (Membership & Marketing).

*Euan Moore* (Executive, Conservation).

*Libby Smith* (Executive, Membership & Marketing).

*Note: brackets indicate committee membership.*

# VNPA ANNUAL REPORT

## 2012-2013



## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATT RUCHEL



The past 12 months have been difficult both organisationally and politically, but in our 60th year the VNPA's dedicated staff, volunteers, members and supporters have continued to stand up for their local environment.

The big issue has been the State Government's move to allow 99-year leases for commercial developments in national parks. We have launched our 'Hands off our Parks' campaign, which (like much of our work) will take time, patience and persistence to be successful.

We have been tireless in our efforts to stop the push to weaken environmental protection across Victoria. Challenges have included:

- **Proposals to introduce commercial-scale ecological thinning trials in red gum national parks.** We have managed to slow this down and get the Victorian and NSW governments to assess it under national environmental laws, but it may return.
- **Opening up more parks to fossicking and prospecting.** Our field work revealed both the extent of damage caused by these activities, and the lack of regulation. A final government decision on this is expected in the next few months. We also supported local groups opposed to open cut mining in the Wombat State Forest.

- **New native vegetation rules** introduced by the Napthine Government. These new rules, which we reviewed and critiqued, are a significant watering-down of existing protections, and in our view will lead to more clearing in the most cleared state in Australia.
- **Plans to hand national environmental powers to state governments.** We worked with allies and partners across the environment movement to oppose this under the Gillard Government, but the Abbott-led coalition went to the election with a 'one-stop shop' policy aimed at handing back both environmental assessment and approval powers to state governments.
- **The strategic assessment of Melbourne's urban growth.** We worked hard with local groups to provide detailed input to ensure maximised protection for threatened species and habitats such as grasslands, Growling Grass Frog and Southern Brown Bandicoot. This process was disappointing and in our view a missed opportunity to get the development/environment protection balance right.
- **Fire management.** We continued to highlight the impacts of excessive control burning on the natural environment.
- **Marine conservation.** We continued to oppose the breakwater plan at Bastion Point (Mallacoota), and released strategic research into the impacts of recreational fishing and the potential impacts of oil spills on Westernport's unique natural values.

In community education and engagement, **NatureWatch** and **Reef Watch** continued to grow in popularity. Exciting new 'Caught on Camera' work in Bunyip State Park highlighted healthy numbers of Southern Brown Bandicoots.

**Reef Watch** celebrated its 10th anniversary, and the Western Blue Groper, first identified by Reef Watch Volunteers, was given permanent protection under fisheries laws.

Our regular **publications** *Park Watch* and *Nature's Voice*, our website, and emailed alerts and updates kept our members abreast of conservation issues.

On the organisational front, for a variety of reasons our income was down, which meant we had to reduce staff levels in some areas. Doing more with less is always challenging, but we have now stabilised and are continuing our work to build an even stronger VNPA.

**A strong community voice for nature** is needed more than ever in Victoria. We are very grateful for the fantastic contributions made by our supporters, members, volunteers and partner organisations. And we rely on, and very much appreciate, your on-going support!





VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*

## BUSHWALKING AND ACTIVITIES GROUP

I'd like to start by thanking all our event leaders for their time and commitment in offering over 250 activities for the year – and thank you to all the participants for supporting them.

These activities are not just enjoyable; they inspire and maintain our appreciation of natural places. Encouraging this appreciation is vital to winning public support to protect our parks.

Local activities covered everything from inner city lanes and parks, popular day trips into the Yarra Ranges and coastal parks, to classic weekends in the Prom, Grampians and Alpine national parks, and there were exciting interstate and overseas visits.

We've tried a couple of new formats with our *Easy Going Ambles* (for those who want the outdoor space without the pace) and *Bring a Friend for Free* walks to help members encourage their friends to enjoy the great outdoors.

BWAG contributed \$9,000 to the VNPA in the past year, with income from walks and the Trivia Night.

**Social nights:** These featured John Bales with highlights of his Spanish walking trip, Tracey-Ann Hooley and me talking about skiing in the Alpine NP, with photos of recent VNPA snow trips, and an inspirational talk by Geoff Durham on highlights of 30 years of leading over 400 *Walk, Talk and Gawk* trips.

Phil Hart showed us the amazing photos and time-lapse videos from his astro-photography expedition to Canada's Yukon province, and Euan Moore and Wilma van Dijk presented the unexpected natural wonders of Taiwan.

We ran another popular Trivia Night in February, our annual Christmas and mid-year get-togethers, and Under 35 Social Nights - including a well-attended *Under 35 Alumni* dinner for those who can remember the good old days!



PHOTO: LARISSA KUCAN

*A VNPA Excursion group enjoys a walk on the Beechy Railtrail near Gellibrand.*

**Training:** Our program included a Navigation Course for members and our first *Walk, Talk and Gawk* training evening. We also ran a navigation course and a leaders training course for two other bushwalking clubs. These helped promote the VNPA and responsible enjoyment of our parks.

**Conservation:** BWAGers participated in conservation activities including the Hindmarsh and Grow West tree plantings, Reef Watch and Clean Up the Alps. We also had 11 popular Walk, Talk & Gawks and lots of NatureWatch activities.

**Thank you:** I'd like to thank the committee members for donating their time to make all this happen. Bob Argent, Terese Dalman, Gayle Davey, Geoff Durham, Sue Catterall and Fred Gerardson have all done a great job.

**Russell Bowey (Convener),  
August 2013**

## EXCURSIONS REPORT

The Excursions Group and its volunteer leaders conducted eleven day trips in 2012-2013. Most were well attended, but overall there was a significant reduction in the number of members and visitors and members participating.

Places visited included Lake Eildon, Queenscliff, Taradale, Mt Donna Buang and Maryborough. On the trips we enjoyed walks, picnics, farmers markets, historic homes, galleries and more.

From the trips the group contributed \$4065 to the VNPA, down from last year. We hope improved publicity might help to boost participation in the coming year.

Many thanks to our trip leaders and to all the members who took part in excursions.

**Larysa Kucan, Convener**

## VOLUNTEERS AND COMMITTEE CONVENORS

### VOLUNTEERS

**Administration Assistants:** Jill Casey, Sandra Cutts, Colette Findlay, Margaret Hattersley, Raimonne McCutchan, Graham Trigg.

**Research Assistants:** Evelyn Feller, Dianne Marshall, Victoria Strutt.

**Education Kit Coordinator:** Jill Casey.

**Grow West & Project Hindmarsh:** John Stirling (*Convener*) and Terese Dalman plus VNPA team leaders and planters.

**Marine & Coastal:** Matilda Reynolds, Jackson Leon-Holland, Natalie Manahan, Chris Smyth.

**Native Vegetation & Grasslands:** Andrew Booth, Elizabeth Donoghue, Yasmin Kelsall, Adrian Marshall.

**Firewood & Grasslands Assistant:** Erin Richardson.

**Market Research & Advice:** Libby Smith.

**NatureWatch:** (*Office volunteers*) John Kotsiaris, Ann Williamson, Christine Connelly, Beatrix Spencer, Lucy Gow. (*Team leaders*) Christine Connelly, Evelyn Chia, David de Angelis, Marion Shadbolt, Bryant Gagliardi, Ned Surla, Garry and Wilma van Dijk, Michael Longmore, Amy O'Dell, Luke Johnson.

**Publications:** John Hutchison, Euan Moore, Geoff Durham, Evelyn Feller.

**Nature's Voice & Park Watch Mailout Team:** Murray Bird, Pat Cooper, Betna Dryden, Jan Gay, Brian Groom, Jo Groom, Margaret Hattersley, John Hutchinson, Kelvin Kellett, Keith Lloyd, Ian McDonald, Elsebeth Murray, Sheina Nicholls, Joan Phillips, Barbara Prouse, Lorraine Ratcliffe, Paul Stokes, Wally Thies, Graham Trigg, Pat Witt.

**Victoria Naturally Alliance:** Ann McGregor, Bruce McGregor, Libby Smith, Lea Scherl and the many people and groups associated with the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance, plus Victoria Naturally Alliance colleagues.

### VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CONVENORS

**Bushwalking & Activities Group:** Russell Bowey.

**Caring For Nature Day:** Reg Elder.

**Conservation & Campaigns:** Euan Moore.

**Executive:** Russell Costello.

**Excursions:** Larysa Kucan.

**Finance:** Gary Allan.

**Membership, Marketing & Communications:** Libby Smith.

**Community Education & Engagement Working Group:** Maelor Himbury.

### HOSTED NETWORK

**Victorian Environment Friends Network Committee:** Ray Radford, Maelor Himbury, Sue Wright, Michael Howes, Robert Bender.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

**Abridged Audited Special Purpose Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2013**

### Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the Council have determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and in our opinion the abridged special purpose financial report set out below presents a true and fair view of the financial position of VNPA as at 30 June 2013 and its

performance for the year ended on that date.

At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the VNPA will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due for payment.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Council and is signed for and on behalf of the Council by:

*Gary Allan (Treasurer) & Matt Ruchel (Executive Director) dated this 29th day of August 2013*

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2013		
REVENUE	2013	2012
<b>Operating Activities</b>	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	602,169	914,617
Grants & Partner Contributions	181,089	302,940
Membership Fees	107,448	115,045
Interest Income & Sundry Sales	91,085	123,081
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>981,792</b>	<b>1,455,683</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
Employment Expenses	772,243	866,115
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	103,091	180,851
Office & Administration	183,539	158,007
Printing/Publications/Web	61,492	75,764
Accommodation & Insurance	103,843	101,540
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,224,207</b>	<b>1,382,277</b>
<b>OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS</b>	<b>(242,415)</b>	<b>73,405</b>
<b>Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds</b>	<b>91,883</b>	<b>(72,321)</b>
<b>OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS</b>	<b>(150,532)</b>	<b>1,084</b>

VNPA – ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2013		
	2013	2012
The operating accounts for the Bushwalking Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:	\$	\$
Income	11,851	8,425
Expenditure	(974)	(984)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(9,000)	(10,000)
<b>CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE</b>	<b>4,142</b>	<b>2,265</b>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2013		
ASSETS	2013	2012
<b>Current</b>	\$	\$
Receivables and Inventory	31,486	59,603
Cash and Cash Equivalents	756,679	1,059,966
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>788,165</b>	<b>1,119,569</b>
<b>Non-Current</b>		
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	20,163	18,909
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>808,328</b>	<b>1,138,477</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Current and Non-Current	299,472	387,206
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>299,472</b>	<b>387,206</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>508,857</b>	<b>751,271</b>
<b>Funded by:</b>		
Association Funds	508,857	751,271
<b>TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS</b>	<b>508,857</b>	<b>751,271</b>

**NOTE:** Independent Audit Report – As in previous years, the Auditor's have issued a qualified Audit Opinion on the annual financial statements on the basis that it is not feasible for organisations such as VNPA to implement accounting controls over all cash collections from donations prior to their initial processing in the accounting records. The full Independent Auditor's Report will be tabled at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting as part of the Audited Financial Statements and the full text of the Report will be available at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au).

## VNPA SUPPORTERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS

### The VNPA acknowledges and thanks the following:

- Australian Communities Foundation
- Alf and Meg Steel Fund, a subfund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- Anonymous donors
- The Arnold Foundation
- Australian Government's Caring for Our Country
- Grants to Voluntary Environment, Sustainability and Heritage Organisations (GVESH0)
- Gras Foundation Trust
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- Loftus-Hills Trust
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Melliadora Fund, a subfund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- Parks Victoria
- Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
- Sidney Myer Foundation
- The Ian Potter Foundation
- The Dara Foundation
- The R.E. Ross Trust
- Treepot

### Support and cooperation from key project partners

- Arthur Rylah Institute
- Biosis Research
- Environment Defenders Office
- Grow West
- Hindmarsh Landcare Network
- Museum Victoria

### Victoria Naturally Alliance partners

- Australian Conservation Foundation
- Bush Heritage Australia
- Birdlife Australia – Victoria
- Environment Victoria
- Invasive Species Council
- Greening Australia - Victoria
- Trust for Nature
- The Wilderness Society Victoria

### VNPA EMPLOYEES

- Executive Director:** Matt Ruchel  
**Fundraising Manager:** Emily Clough  
**Direct Marketing Officer:** Maxine Hawkins  
**Fundraiser:** Lara Hookham (to 6/9/12)  
**Communications & Marketing:** Ann Strunks (to 28/3/13)  
**Finance & Operations Manager:** Shanti Fowler (to 8/2/13)  
**Finance & Operations Manager:** Heath Rickard (from 21/1/13)  
**Administration & Membership Officer:** Amy Dyer (maternity leave)  
**Administration Assistants:** Charlotte Kandelaars, Irina De Loche  
**Marine & Coastal Project Officer:** Simon Branigan  
**Nature Watch/Community Projects Coordinator:** Caitlin Griffith  
**Park Protection Project Officer:** Phil Ingamells  
**Red Gum & River Rescue Project Coordinator:** Nick Roberts  
**Reef Watch Coordinator:** Wendy Roberts  
**Park Watch/Nature's Voice Editor & Publications Officer:** Michael Howes  
**Victorian Naturally Alliance Project Leader:** Karen Alexander  
**Central Victorian Biolink Project Officer:** Sophie Bickford  
**Conservation Review Project Coordinator:** Andrew Cox