

ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014



PRESIDENT'S REPORT VNPA PRESIDENT RUSSELL COSTELLO

My second year as President has been another challenging one for the VNPA, but I'm pleased to say we have steadied the ship and can report a small financial surplus this year.

However, if it weren't for our many supporters, both financial and volunteer, there would be very little to report.

I especially want to thank all our members and our donors, large and small – those who responded to our appeals and those who decided to join the regular giving scheme. You are the reason we can still make a difference.

I said last year that the budget had been tight, with so much to do and defend. The same has been true of this year. Your Council has again deeply appreciated the special efforts and sacrifices by Matt and his staff.

The VNPA is a rare beast. Aside from the mighty efforts of the staff, a large portion of our output comes from the dedicated efforts of our volunteers, including all the members of the Council and its committees, the volunteers who work in the office and those who support the VNPA's campaigns and activities. I thank you all.

A highlight of the past year is the completion of our fourth Nature Conservation Review. This has taken a huge effort by staff, volunteers and consultants, and is our most comprehensive review yet. Congratulations to all those involved. It will be an invaluable guide for us over the coming years.

We also produced a major review of coastal conservation priorities. Chris Smyth's report, *The Coast is Unclear*, is a great contribution to understanding our unique coastal environment.

Our 'Hands Off' human sign at the Prom last November saw some 1200 people attending to 'Shine a Light' for parks. It was a massive effort to send a message that parks are for nature and the future. Our message was supported by over 20 eminent Victorians, who called the Government's development proposals 'a betrayal of public trust'.

In the Supreme Court, we are challenging the lawfulness of the State Government's reintroduction of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park under the guise of 'research'. This is in many ways a test case, representing a 'line in the sand' against the Government's continued undermining of national parks.

This is a State election year, so it's perhaps timely to reflect on the 'achievements' of the past four years of government.

On the conservation front, this government has been uninspired and uninterested. We welcome its continued support for Landcare, but successive governments have done this. The Two Million Tree initiative allows no understorey planting, so the result is often weedy plantations. Some Crown land has been reallocated to the Yellingbo reservations and a tiny amount of Mountain Ash forest reserved to protect the State's emblem Leadbeater's Possum.

But on the down side, in addition to alpine cattle grazing, it's a long list:

- 99-year leases for private developers in national parks
- handover of the historic Point Nepean Quarantine Station to developers
- 25,000 additional hectares of parks opened up for fossicking and prospecting, even though VEAC found there were significant impacts
- attempts to resume logging in the new red gum parks
- abandoning the creation of a River Murray reserve
- watering down of native vegetation rules
- significant cuts (of over 100 staff) to Parks Victoria
- resumption of logging in the State's western forests, and logging of much of the last remaining Central Highlands Leadbeater's habitat
- significant inroads into Melbourne's Green Wedges, and sell-outs on conservation strategies for the development precincts
- new and increased camping fees to deter visitors to our national parks

- rigid adherence to the 390,000 ha (5%) fuel reduction burning target, devastating easy-to-burn areas like the Mallee parks that pose little threat to people or property rather than control burning high-risk areas near towns
- a major threat to Westernport Bay from the proposed huge port development in this highly sensitive Ramsar wetland

At the national level, we also have Minister Hunt wanting to turn over his powers under the Commonwealth environment legislation to the State. These have been the only effective environmental laws to hold the State back from rampaging over much more of the developable but ecologically valuable land around Melbourne, particularly in recent years.

Whatever lies ahead in this election year, I am sure the challenges will keep coming. On your behalf, we will continue to campaign for a better deal for our parks, for nature conservation and for people to be able to enjoy them in eco-sensitive ways.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

President: *Russell Costello* (Executive, Membership & Marketing, Conservation)

Vice President: *Euan Moore* (Executive, Conservation)

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

Treasurer: *Gary Allan* (Executive, Finance)

Ann Birrell (Executive, Governance Policy & Legal)

Russell Bowey (Executive, Bushwalking & Activities Group)

Andrew Dodd (Executive, Membership & Marketing) – to 15 May 2014

Michael Feller (Conservation)

Deborah Henry (Education & Events, Bushwalking & Activities Group)

Kyle Matheson (Finance)

Heather Macauley (Membership & Marketing) - to March 2014

Libby Smith (Membership & Marketing)

Note: Committee memberships in brackets



PHOTO: MARTIN BENNETT

THE YEAR IN REVIEW VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATT RUCHEL



As always, the VNPA continued to stand up for nature and our national parks estate. This year again we have defended them against a series of threats and backward steps.

Hands off Parks!

The Napthine Government continued with plans to open parks for commercial operations. We received welcome support on this front when a group of eminent Victorians condemned these moves as 'a betrayal of public trust'. We followed this with our successful 'Shine a Light' activity at the Prom in November. Over 1200 members and supporters travelled down to send a clear 'Hands off Parks!' message.

Alpine grazing again

The cattle grazing 'trial' in the Alpine NP was resurrected after being blocked by the previous federal government. It received swift approval from new federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt, and commenced for just a few weeks before the cattle were removed with the onset of winter. We have now taken the bold step of challenging the lawfulness of this grazing 'trial' in the Victorian Supreme Court.

Fossickers get fossicked

The Coalition quietly announced before the 2010 election that it would increase access to national parks for fossickers and prospectors. VEAC investigated this, the government requiring it to identify additional places in parks for such activities. VEAC's report found that these activities have adverse environmental impacts and do not fit with the objectives of national parks. 25,000ha in additional parks were found for fossicking and prospecting, but motorised water pumps used by fossickers have been banned.

Port of Hastings

There has been much political noise about developing Hastings into a mega container port, with up to 3000 ships per year. We released a series of reports on this, including detailed modelling of impacts from minor oil spills on seagrass fish nurseries, penguins and migratory bird species. We also held a series of well-attended public briefings.

Coastal conservation

We released a detailed assessment of coastal conservation priorities in the report 'The Coast is Unclear: an uncertain future for nature along the Victorian coastline', which highlights the unique natural attributes of our fantastic coastline and the issues facing it.

Burn target

The evidence against a simplistic 5% statewide fuel reduction target continues to build. Scientists, the community and many in government departments are questioning this policy, which has profound impacts on the state's biodiversity. We hope there will soon be moves to review and modify it in a strategic way.

Great Forests National Park

The proposal for a new and extended national park in the Central Highlands gained momentum through the year. The VNPA is actively supporting the push to protect significant areas to ensure the survival of Leadbeater's Possum and other threatened species, and water catchments.

Habitat protection

The Napthine Government's changes to native vegetation clearing rules continued to be implemented, even as further flaws were highlighted. However, partly due to the very close numbers

in parliament, the Opposition defeated the Government's native vegetation bill, putting it off indefinitely – or at least until after the coming state election.

Bandicoot battles

The Commonwealth – State Strategic Assessment, which looked at protecting native grasslands and species impacted on by urban development, was largely approved the day before the federal election. The part of this plan relating to the survival of Southern Brown Bandicoots in Melbourne's SE had still to be delivered. The Napthine Government then produced a new minimalist plan for approval by the Abbott Government. We understand the plan has now been approved, with some welcome amendments, but it is still far from as good as the original draft plan released in 2010.

Community monitoring and outreach

Our NatureWatch program goes from strength to strength. The Caught on Camera project, now in its third year, is starting to deliver some surprising results. We recorded for the first time the elusive Brush-tailed Phascogale (or Tuan) in the Wombat Forest, and surprised even local rangers in Bunyip State Park with photos of Southern Brown Bandicoots. Reef Watch continued to engage people in Victoria's underwater world, and we celebrated the 10th annual Great Victorian Fish Count.

Many thanks to our dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters who help keep the show on the road. We really appreciate and rely on your ongoing support!

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VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature

BUSHWALKING AND ACTIVITIES GROUP

First, thanks to all our volunteers, including walk leaders, Emergency Contacts, leader mentors, event coordinators and committee members. They made it possible to organise over 250 activities (including 30 overnight walks and base camps) and social events for the year.

Thanks also to all participants for supporting the activities, which covered all areas of the state from suburban parklands to beaches, cliff walks to high country hikes, paddling down the Goulburn to skiing over Stirling, and much more.

Some leaders deserve a special mention. Larysa Kucan and Jan Lacey have done a wonderful job coordinating the coach excursions. Geoff Durham has continued his Easy-going Ambles, and Ruth Stirling and Sue Parkhill have excelled with their Monday walks.

We increased the number of Walk, Talk and Gawk leaders and offered 20 WT&Gs, nearly double the previous year.

BWAGers also participated in conservation activities including Hindmarsh, Grow West and Reef Watch, and many headed down to the Prom to support the VNPA's 'Hands off Parks!' human sign.

Congrats to Richard Tagg for his initiative in promoting BWAG activities through the social media website *MeetUp*. There's been positive feedback and we'll extend the trial into next year. We've also continued our *Bring a Friend for Free* initiative.

Rob Argent organised a well-attended dinner for leaders and Emergency Contacts to show our appreciation to these volunteers. Sixteen leaders did first-aid training, supported by a grant obtained through the VNPA office.

Our club social nights covered local environmental projects as well as international adventures. Wendy Roberts explained Reef Watch and Citizen Science; Jim Noelker presented the video *Wyperfeld 100*; John Bales showed highlights of his VNPA trip to national parks in western USA. There were many other great presentations.

We had an evening with talks on light-weight hiking and successful packing, and a gear night where members

Mt Bogong



PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

donated surplus gear for sale to eager purchasers. Thanks to those who donated; we raised \$350 for the night.

Other social activities were the regular Christmas and mid-year dinners, monthly Under 35 dinners and the U35 Alumni dinner. Sue Catterall organised our very popular inaugural Odd Ball, for which 19 attendees donned formal attire with a twist!

BWAG contributed \$10,000 to the VNPA with income from walks and other activities.

Finally, I'd like to thank the committee for making all this happen. Rob Argent, Terese Dalman, Gayle Davey, Geoff Durham, Sue Catterall, Deb Henry and Julia Pickwick have all done a great job.

Russell Bowey, Convener

EXCURSIONS GROUP

We conducted 10 day trips in 2013-14, all led by volunteer leaders. All were well attended, with a total of 412 members and visitors.

Places visited included Mt Worth, the Grampians, Mt Alexander, Creswick, Nagambie, Inverloch and Shepparton. Members enjoyed walks in national parks and along rail trails, picnics, farmers' markets, historic homes and galleries.

VNPA has been using the services of McKenzie's Coaches since the early 1960s, and we thank them for their continued support. Their expert bus drivers greatly contribute to the success of the excursions.

As a result of these trips the group contributed \$5299 to VNPA, up from the previous year's \$4065.

Many thanks to the trip leaders and all who participated in the 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.

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.

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: 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.

VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CONVENORS

Bushwalking & Activities Group: Russell Bowey.

Conservation & Campaigns: Euan Moore.

Executive: Russell Costello.

Excursions: Larysa Kucan.

Finance: Gary Allan.

Membership, Marketing & Communications: Russell Costello (acting).

Community Education & Engagement Working Group: Russell Costello (acting).

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 2014.

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 2014 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 4th day of September 2014

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2014		
REVENUE	2014	2013
Operating Activities	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	847,167	602,169
Grants & Partner Contributions	159,527	181,089
Membership Fees	116,668	107,448
Interest Income & Sundry Sales	62,304	91,085
Total Income	1,185,666	981,791
EXPENDITURE		
Employment Expenses	712,957	772,243
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	89,114	103,091
Office & Administration	164,656	183,539
Printing/Publications/Web	70,032	61,492
Accommodation & Insurance	103,246	103,843
Total Expenses	1,140,004	1,224,208
OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS	45,661	(242,415)
Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds	(20,089)	138,717
OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS	25,572	(103,698)

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2014		
ASSETS	2014	2013
Current	\$	\$
Receivables and Inventory	142,414	31,486
Cash and Cash Equivalents	748,088	756,679
Total Current Assets	890,502	788,165
Non-Current		
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	32,421	20,163
TOTAL ASSETS	922,924	808,328
LIABILITIES		
Current and Non-Current	368,406	299,472
TOTAL LIABILITIES	368,406	299,472
NET ASSETS	554,518	508,857
Funded by:		
Association Funds	554,518	508,857
TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS	554,518	508,857

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.

VNPA BWAG ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2014		
The operating accounts for the Bushwalking Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:	2014	2013
	\$	\$
Opening Bank Account Balance	4,142	2,265
Income	9,365	11,851
Expenditure	(382)	(974)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(10,000)	(9,000)
CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE	3,125	4,142

VNPA SUPPORTERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS

The VNPA acknowledges and thanks our key supporters, donors and partners for their generous support.

Donors

- Alf and Meg Steel Fund, a subfund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- The Arnold Foundation
- Coastcare Victoria
- The Dara Foundation
- Field Naturalists Club of Victoria
- Grants to Voluntary Environment, Sustainability and Heritage Organisations (GVESHO)
- Gras Foundation Trust
- Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- Loftus-Hill Fund, a subfund of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Parks Victoria
- Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
- Tree Pot

Project partners

- bankmecu
- Ecology Australia
- Environmental Justice Australia
- Museum Victoria
- Practical Ecology
- The Wilderness Society
- The University of Melbourne
- Volunteering Western Victoria

Community project partners

- Blue Wedges Coalition
- Grow West
- Hindmarsh Landcare Network
- Friends of Bunyip State Park
- Preserve Westernport Action Group
- Westernport & Peninsula Protection Council
- Wombat Forestcare

VNPA EMPLOYEES

Executive Director: Matt Ruchel

Fundraising Manager: Emily Clough

Direct Marketing Officer: Maxine Hawkins

Finance & Operations Manager: Heath Rickard

Administration Assistants:

Charlotte Kandelaars, Irina De Loche

Marine & Coastal Project Officer: Simon Branigan

Nature Watch/Community Projects

Coordinator: Caitlin Griffith (to 1/1/14 - maternity leave)

Nature Watch/Community Projects

Coordinator: Christine Connelly (from 1/1/14)

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 (to 1/12/13)

Central Victorian Biolink Project Officer: Sophie Bickford (to 30/06/14)

Conservation Review Project Coordinator: Andrew Cox