



First Friends of Dandenong Creek

Annual Report 2021

COMMITTEE

We have operated successfully with an active committee of 11 throughout the year. Anthony Bigelow as President, Charlie Miller as Vice President, Hannah Skipworth as Secretary, Lex Edmond as Membership Secretary, Chris Macfarlane as Treasurer and with John Cull, Robert Lee, Bill Jones, Matt McCabe, Bruna Iotti and Jesse Oehm making up the general committee.

In May we mourned the passing of Barry Robinson, foundation member, former President and life member of the First Friends of Dandenong Creek. Barry was instrumental in the group's formation in 1999 and championed the best environmental values for the area beyond his involvement with FFDC. He was President and Vice President from 1999 – 2010, and ran the Waterwatch team for a number of years. He was a passionate and dedicated leader of our group and he set in motion many environmental outcomes in our area, which we simply cannot repay Barry for.

MEMBERSHIP

FFDC currently has 190 full and associate members and is growing. There have been around 20 new memberships in the past year.

NEWSLETTER, WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

Three editions of Tanjenong Tales were published during the year. Our newsletters are all emailed these days which significantly reduces the administrative burden and cost of publishing the newsletters.

Our Facebook page now has over 6,000 followers, up from 4000 last year. The page contributes significantly to increased awareness of our group and the great work we do in the wider community. We acknowledge the efforts of Anthony Bigelow and Hannah Skipworth in managing our Facebook presence with regular posts and responses.

Our website has been redesigned and is looking fantastic thanks to the efforts of Hannah Skipworth.

GRANTS

This financial year we received nearly \$34,000 in grant money for projects including administration support, plants and the Drain Sock Trial. We acknowledge the continual funding support of Melbourne Water, Landcare Vic, PPWPCMA, Knox and Maroondah councils. Without this funding FFDC would struggle to operate as an incorporated body and undertake meaningful projects.

EQUIPMENT

We were finally able to erect our new branded marquee, teardrop signs and pull up banners at our Clean Up Australia Day event in February, it all looks fantastic.

FINANCIAL POSITION

We have maintained a strong financial position throughout the year with a bank balance of **\$36,559** as at 30 June. A majority of that balance is funding for current projects. For details refer to the 2021 Treasurer's report on our website at www.ffdc.org.au.

EVENTS

Clean Up Australia Day

A BIG thank you to all of the 40 or so volunteers who came to our Clean Up Australia Day event along the creek in Bayswater on Clean Up Australia Day, Sunday 7 March. It was wonderful to see a large turnout, but especially good

to see how the quantity of rubbish collected was down on last year's record of 45 bags; it amounted to around 15 bags this year. We also thank the volunteers who regularly clean up litter along the creek as they enjoy this wonderful area.

World Environment Day

Due to COVID-19 restrictions we had to cancel our planned event on World Environment Day, Saturday 5th June. This was to be a combined event with Bayswater Rotary, who were celebrating their 100th year. Knox Council Biodiversity team subsequently organised a contractor to plant 2,500 indigenous species in a section of the creek near Radonic Drive in Bayswater. With thanks to Knox Council for funding this event.

National Tree Day

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions we had to cancel our National Tree Day event planned for Sunday 1 August. We had planned to plant 4,000 indigenous species along the creek near the Maroondah Nets facility in Heathmont. Thanks to the efforts of the Maroondah Bushland team and the Leisure staff, the 4,000 trees, shrubs and grasses were planted in the area. Half the plants were funded by a grant from Melbourne Water, the remainder funded by Maroondah Council.

PROJECTS

Pollution Monitoring

The monitors are installed at 5 locations along the creek between Bayswater and Vermont. We believe this is the first type of deployment of this technology by a community group anywhere in Australia. The real time sensors look for characteristics of pollution events, including temperature fluctuations, pH changes and conductivity. The sensors relay the information back to an online portal. The sensors required some maintenance during the year due to flood damage. Thanks to our project partner Bio2Lab for their support. Melbourne Water have agreed to fund the maintenance of the sensors for us for the next 2 years.

Save our Skinks

The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on outdoor gatherings, wet weather prior to that and winter has meant the project is on hold. In our latest surveys we are yet to find any Swamp or Glossy Grass skinks, although we have found some McCoy's Skinks that had not previously been found.

Eel video

We proudly announced the release of our short film, **'The Eels of Dandenong Creek'** on 17 February. The concept for the film came out of a pollution event that we witnessed along Dandenong Creek in November 2017 that virtually wiped out the eels in our area. The film touches on their amazing lifecycle, what the eels meant to our indigenous nations, and how urbanisation is affecting them. With thanks to Uncle Dave from Wurwundjeri, Dr Dave Sharley and Steve Marshall from Bio2labs, and Dr Wayne Koster from Arthur Rylah Institute for being part of the film. Thank you also to Living Links and the Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation for funding the film, and to the Knox Environment Society for providing auspice. A big thank you to our President Anthony Bigelow for bringing this whole project together.

Save our Sugar Gliders

The rollout of our sugar glider nest boxes started in June. Richard Francis and the team from Abzeco (our project partner) installed the first 25 boxes in public areas along the creek. The sugar glider boxes are pre-cut by a cabinet maker and then handed over to the Men's Shed in Ringwood to be put together, paint and tag and label the boxes for us. The boxes are made with timber offcuts that would otherwise have gone to landfill.

Once the installation of the boxes in public areas is completed we will be in touch with our members who have registered their interest in hosting boxes in their gardens.

We purchased a nest box survey kit to monitor box usage by the gliders. The kit includes a small digital camera, which is placed on top of an extension pole, and this is inserted into the side of the nestbox. The video feed is then sent wirelessly to three remote viewing monitors.

Lizard Lounge

Our skink revegetation site at Connolly Reserve in Bayswater North is looking fantastic, after a gargantuan effort by volunteers and the Maroondah Council Bushland team members, and specialist contractors over the last 12 months. In June we applied for a grant for \$26,000 from the Victorian Landcare grants scheme funding for the expansion and maintenance of the existing site. The grant will cover the cost of plants, site prep, weeding and watering as well as support from Abzeco, our project partner. We acknowledge the support of Rebecca Penrose from Maroondah Bushland team for all of her advice and expertise to help us achieve this outcome.

Drain Sock Trial

FFDC was successful in obtaining a community development grant of \$17,000 from Knox Council, for a trial of a drain sock to capture rubbish in the creek. Thanks to Jude Dwight who put in the grant application to Council. We believe this is the first trial of this technology in Melbourne. The intention is a large net is placed over a stormwater pipe outlet in the creek to capture the rubbish before it enters the waterway. A location has been chosen for the trial of the drain sock, and approval was received from the flood investigations team at Melbourne. The drain sock will be attached to the stormwater pipe outlet underneath the railway bridge on the Belgrave line along the creek in Bayswater.

Anthony Bigelow – President - First Friends of Dandenong Creek.