



First Friends of Dandenong Creek

Annual Report 2020

COMMITTEE

We have operated successfully with an active committee of 12 throughout the year. Anthony Bigelow as President, Charlie Miller as Vice President, Lex Edmond as Minute Secretary, Barb Richards as Membership Secretary, Chris McFarlane as Treasurer and with Robert Lee, Hannah Skipworth, Georgie Christopher, Bill Jones, Matt McCabe, Jude Dwight, Bruna Iotti and Jesse Oehm making up the general committee. Sadly, Barb Richards passed away in February this year after 13 years dedicated service to the Committee. In June, Hannah Skipworth became Secretary replacing Lex Edmond who took over the role of Membership Secretary. The group acknowledged Lex's service as Secretary in recent years and thanked Hannah for volunteering for the role.

MEMBERSHIP

FFDC currently has 170+ full and associate members and 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. Over 90% of our newsletters are emailed these days which significantly reduces the administrative burden and cost of publishing the newsletters.

Our Facebook page now has over 4,000 followers, up from 2,500 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 is being redesigned thanks to the efforts of Hannah Skipworth.

GRANTS

This year we received over \$57,202 in grant money for projects including pollution monitoring, planting and Save our Sugar Gliders. We acknowledge the continual funding support of Melbourne Water, Living Links, Knox and Maroondah councils and the Federal Govt thanks to local MPs Alan Tudge and Michael Sukkar. Without this funding FFDC would struggle to operate as an incorporated body and undertake meaningful projects.

EQUIPMENT

Our equipment has proved useful at our events earlier this year. Thanks to a grant from Knox Council we purchased FFDC branded items including a marquee, teardrop signs, pull up banner and T-Shirts. These items added to our existing BBQ, four A-frame sign boards, Hamilton tree planters and litter collection tools.

FINANCIAL POSITION

We have maintained a strong financial position throughout the year with a bank balance around \$61,997.84 at 30 June. For details refer to the 2020 Treasurer's report on our website at www.ffdc.org.au.

This year we moved our banking from the Commonwealth Bank to the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank because the latter is more supportive of community groups.

EVENTS

Clean Up Australia Day

Around 70 local volunteers collected a record 45 bags of rubbish along the creek from HE Parker Reserve in Heathmont down to Eastlink in Wantirna on Clean Up Australia Day. We acknowledge our event partner Jackson Taylor MP for supporting the event. We gratefully acknowledge the all year round litter collection efforts of our members and volunteers.

World Environment Day

Despite COVID-19 restrictions on World Environment Day, Saturday 7th June, 2,500 indigenous plants were returned to a section of the creek, which was previously mown grass, near the confluence of Heatherdale Creek. A special thanks to Jude Dwight and her students from Swinburne University for organising the event.

National Tree Day

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions we had to cancel our National Tree Day event planned for Sunday 2 August. We had planned to plant 4,000 plants along the creek in the vicinity of the Heathmont Scout Hall. Thanks to the efforts of the Committee and families and the Maroondah Bushland team and the Leisure staff, 4,000 trees, shrubs and grasses have been planted in the area. The plants were funded by a grant from the Living Links program.

PROJECTS

Pollution Monitoring

FFDC received a Federal Government grant to the value of \$19,816 to deploy Real Time monitoring sensors along the creek. The monitors were installed by Bio2Lab for the group in 5 locations 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 are designed to look for characteristics of pollution events, including temperature fluctuations, pH changes and conductivity. The sensors relay the information back to an online portal, which then notifies the team, and additionally track the historical pollution events. We thank Alan Tudge MP for supporting our application to the Federal Government's Communities Environment Program. We acknowledge Anthony Bigelow and Jude Dwight for the idea and inspiration behind this groundbreaking project.

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

The background to the video is we are looking to cover a number of aspects including the amazing lifecycle of the Short-finned eels in our creek, and how that's being affected through pollution. We have received partial funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation at present, and will be working with Remember the Wild to produce the video. We also wish to highlight the connection with the indigenous community. To cover off on the pollution aspect, we will be working with Dr Dave Sharley from Bio2labs, and have approached for permission to interview experts Wayne Koster and Tarmo Raadik from Arthur Rylah Institute in Melbourne on the lifecycle aspect. The video is estimated to be between 5-6 minutes at this point in time, and include underwater filming along with interviews of relevant local community members, experts and ideally representatives from the indigenous community. The aim of the video is to make a connection between the lifecycle of the eels, which live in Dandenong Creek. The bigger picture here is that Dandenong Creek is representative of many urban creeks across Melbourne and additionally across the Eastern seaboard in our urban setting. We wish to showcase their amazing lifecycle, and highlight that 'life' exists in our creeks, and they aren't just 'dirty drains' they harbor life in all forms. People need to connect their actions in relation to pollution, whether it's runoff from the streets or in particular, large scale pollution events coming in from the neighboring industrial estates.

Save our Sugar Gliders

This project, spearheaded by FFDC and supported by Maroondah Council and Abzeco, records glider occupancy in specially designed, strategically placed nesting boxes. The boxes will be installed in reserves, schools and resident gardens in Heathmont near the creek. Trained experts will check their occupancy regularly and document the findings. Findings will inform a corridor strategy for the Heathmont area that FFDC and Maroondah Council can use to protect, maintain and enhance our corridors. With increasing urban development, the corridors they live and travel in are disappearing.

Lizard Lounge

The implementation of our successful \$13,000 Federal Government grant, in aid of sensitive revegetation of land for

the Glossy Grass skinks, is currently underway. FFDC is working with Maroondah Council and David De Angelis from Abzeco to deliver the project. The plan is to convert a previously mown grass area on council land along the creek in North Bayswater, known as Connelly Reserve, over to skink friendly habitat.

Anthony Bigelow – President - First Friends of Dandenong Creek.