

**CASTLEMAINE LANDCARE GROUP
2022 COMMITTEE REPORT
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 25 MAY 2023**

The year 2022 began with energy, plans and dreams.

We had 2 grants for on-ground work:

- a 4-year Local Landcare Partnerships grant from Mount Alexander Shire Council (MASC) providing nearly \$5 000 per year for the Indigenous Food and Fibre (IFF) site, of which we were finishing our third and entering our fourth year

- a 1 year Victorian Landcare Grant from State Government (DELWP via North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) totalling \$17 000 for Moonlight Creek (titled *Linked by Moonlight*) and were completing another Victorian Landcare Grant totalling \$30 000 for our project to revitalise the channelised section of Forest Creek. For all of those grants we were extremely grateful as they gave us the chance to continue to reduce weeds, particularly Phalaris, and begin revegetation with priority plants identified by Djaara. MASC also contributed \$2000 to the Linked by Moonlight project to achieve additional spraying and planting.

COVID was still amongst us, but we set up a very busy agenda for the year. Optimistically, we delivered invitations to more than 100 households neighbouring Moonlight Creek to join us in our first working bee of the year on the Linked by Moonlight Project. We designed and published our new website, and 3 committee updated their First Aid qualifications. We even entertained the idea of recognising the silver wattle, the symbol of the Wararack Initiative in the community, in our plans for September (Wattle Day).

But that optimism was sorely challenged. The silver wattle hit back, giving some volunteers a form of contact dermatitis, the weather delivered rain which was at first welcome and then increasingly unwelcome, a key contractor became unavailable and supply chain challenges pushed up the cost of materials significantly. As well, a number of our Valley 'roos had to be euthanased because of Phalaris Staggers. We had a second go at direct seeding of Murnong that we had propagated, but still with no obvious success.

We probably should not have given the rain the impression that it was too much, because once it stopped, the year went dead dry. However, 2 Quail were sighted briefly on the IFF site, most likely as a result of that abnormal rainfall. That was a bonus.

Despite setbacks, we planted more than 2500 plants during the year and provided 2880 hours of voluntary work. That work proved to be harder than we had experienced previously on our sites, due partly to the need to change methods of preparation to fit within rising costs and limited time available. Phalaris, rocks and clay proved stubborn on the Moonlight Creek site and that rain found every weed seed it could encourage to join the race to totally obliterate our hard work. The floods showed no respect, either.

We were joined in our planting by more than 75 planters on National Tree Day, by 47 students from Castlemaine Secondary College on a slightly more inviting-weather day and by 6 members of the MASC Youth Committee and 2 adults during school holidays. One volunteer who could not work weekends came diligently to the IFF site mid-week and removed large amounts of Wild Radish and Thistles. She deserves special thanks.

We had other help, too. MASC kindly helped with an informal path to the IFF site that avoided having to cross the swollen creek. They agreed to our plan to place a 1000l tank on the south-east end of the site to assist with water on site and the Natural Environments Officer provided a round of contractor spraying for gorse. In recognition of the need for continuing support, we made a submission to the 2022-23 budget for additional staffing support for Landcare in our efforts to reduce weeds.

And the ever-helpful Lions Club supported us once again to serve lunch on National Tree Day, including the delicious soup made by one of our members. Regrettably the Landmate crew from Middleton was unable to help us during 2022 due to the risk of COVID.

Under the Revitalisation Project, an Implementation Group led by Castlemaine Landcare Group delivered the first stage funded by the Victorian Landcare Grant. Consulting Group Alluvium conducted an online survey to seek community views on how the channelised section of Forest Creek could be treated to give it a more natural function and provided a design to guide the next stage.

Our faithful Waterwatch Team kept up their monthly measurements. Founding member Anne Perkins finally hung up her kit after 17 dedicated years and her place has been taken by the very busy but always ready-for-more Malcolm Robins. He joins the equally dedicated Matt Kennedy who will report at the AGM – but CLG is always looking for one or two more to help our monitoring.

Our dedicated bird monitoring team of Euan Moore, Jenny Rolland and Peter and Rosemary Turner all devoted themselves to another year of providing us with a better understanding of how our landcare work is making a difference. They have also introduced iNaturalist to the way we see and record our patch and without them, we would be doing only half the job that is expected of us.

CLG was represented on MASC's *Castlemaine Urban Waterways Forum*, where delivering a Management Plan for the public land along Forest and Campbells Creek and matters such as reducing turbidity are considered. In December, we met with MASC representatives to discuss appropriate positioning for the section of the walking and cycling track near Duke Street.

Our working area was included for particular treatment through the Strategic Fuel Breaks program initiated by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP, now DEECA). This program was improved considerably by very knowledgeable local environmentalists and more focus was given to biodiversity values in devising some new approaches to managing fire and reducing weeds. Well done, knowledgeable locals and DELWP.

Castlemaine Landcare Group was represented on the Members Council of Landcare Victoria Incorporated (LVI) and contributed to policy and strategy formulation throughout the year. LVI is the umbrella organisation that provides support to and advocacy on behalf of member groups and networks. Urban landcare and biosecurity were a particular focus for our input but the Members Council also discussed matters such as a 4 year plan for Landcare across Victoria, LVI input to State election policy, support for volunteers and fundraising.

The fundraising issue has been particularly helpful. LVI organises annual insurance for several hundred groups and in 2022 gained Deductible Gift Recipient status. Alongside that DGR capability, LVI became able to offer donors the ability to nominate a particular landcare group to whom the gift can be directed, meaning that individual landcare groups can benefit without having to have their own DGR status. This gives tax benefits to the donor as well as potential sources of funds to landcare groups and we appreciate the valuable work that LVI has been doing on our behalf.

Our local Connecting Country also included our working areas in a brochure for beginning bird watchers and a Sticky Beak tour of a number of landcare sites. Castlemaine Landcare Group is also represented on the Advisory Committee for the Landcare Facilitator for the Shire.

So, thanks are due to all of our volunteers and partners for seeing us through a sticky year. We look forward to what our 2022 plantings will tell us about survival.