



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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See our new web site at <http://friendsvic.org/>

Best Friend Award 2017 ceremony to be held on Saturday 14th October

VEFN's 2017 Best Friend Award ceremony will be held on Saturday 14th October at the Darebin Environment Centre. The Centre is located in the Darebin Parklands at the eastern end of Separation Street, Alphington. The Melways map reference is 31C9.

Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change will again attend the ceremony and present the awards.



Environment Minister, Lily D'Ambrosio presented the 2016 awards to Stanley Barker, Friends of Burke Road Billabong Reserve; Peter Somerville, Friends of Maribyrnong Valley; Paul Strickland, Friends of Mount Worth State Park; Merrin Butler, Friends of Mount Worth State Park; Terry Lane; Friends of Organ Pipes National Park and Jane Hollands, Friends of Sassafras Creek.

VEFN's Best Friend Award is designed to recognise volunteers who make an outstanding contribution through exceptional dedication as a Friend. For those who receive an award, it has particular significance knowing that nominations are made by your peers; members of your own Friends group, who know better than most the personal dedication that is required. Please come along to the 2017 awards ceremony and support your Friends.

The ceremony will commence at 11am and the awards will be presented at approximately 12.15pm. A light lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Please register your attendance by emailing friendsvic@hotmail.org or calling or texting the Secretary, Stephen Derrick on 0417 326 860.

Building partnership capacity with Friends groups

Early notice of Mentoring Forum March 2018



VEFN, in conjunction with the Yarra Riverkeeper Association is planning a full day Mentoring Forum for members of Friends Groups to be held on 17 March 2018. The title of the forum is *Building Partnership Capacity with Friends Groups*. The forum will focus on Friends and other environmental volunteering groups working along the Yarra River, but participation from all Friends groups is strongly encouraged.

The purpose of the forum is to provide opportunities for Friends Groups and Government Agencies to: build relationships; network; better understand each other's needs and resources through partnering; and hear how to secure funding and resources. Although examples will be provided from a variety of partnerships working in the Yarra Catchment, the information will be useful for anyone hoping to secure more resources and work better with partner agencies. The seminar will feature:

- Case studies from Friends Groups of successful partnering, including challenges of getting started, securing resources, and working effectively as partners.
- Agencies discussing potential resourcing opportunities and how they might be developed/obtained.
- A panel of Funding Organisations
- Opportunities to network with agencies and Friends group members.

The Mentoring Forum is being supported by funding provided by the Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning.

Further details will be provided in the coming months. Please let us know now of your interest in attending by email to Roger Parker at Parker.rogger@bigpond.com so that we can ensure adequate facilities and keep you informed of details.

Community skills development grants

Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change announced the availability of \$600,000 in grant funds on Friday 8th September for Community Skills Development projects.

The grants are intended to enable volunteer groups and networks to invest in training and development to increase their collective skills.

In announcing the grants, the Minister said 'A total of \$600,000 is available to strengthen and support Landcare, the Friends Of network, Coastcare and other environmental volunteer groups in the important work they do. Individual groups will be eligible for \$5,000 grants while networks and partnership groups will be eligible for up to \$20,000.'

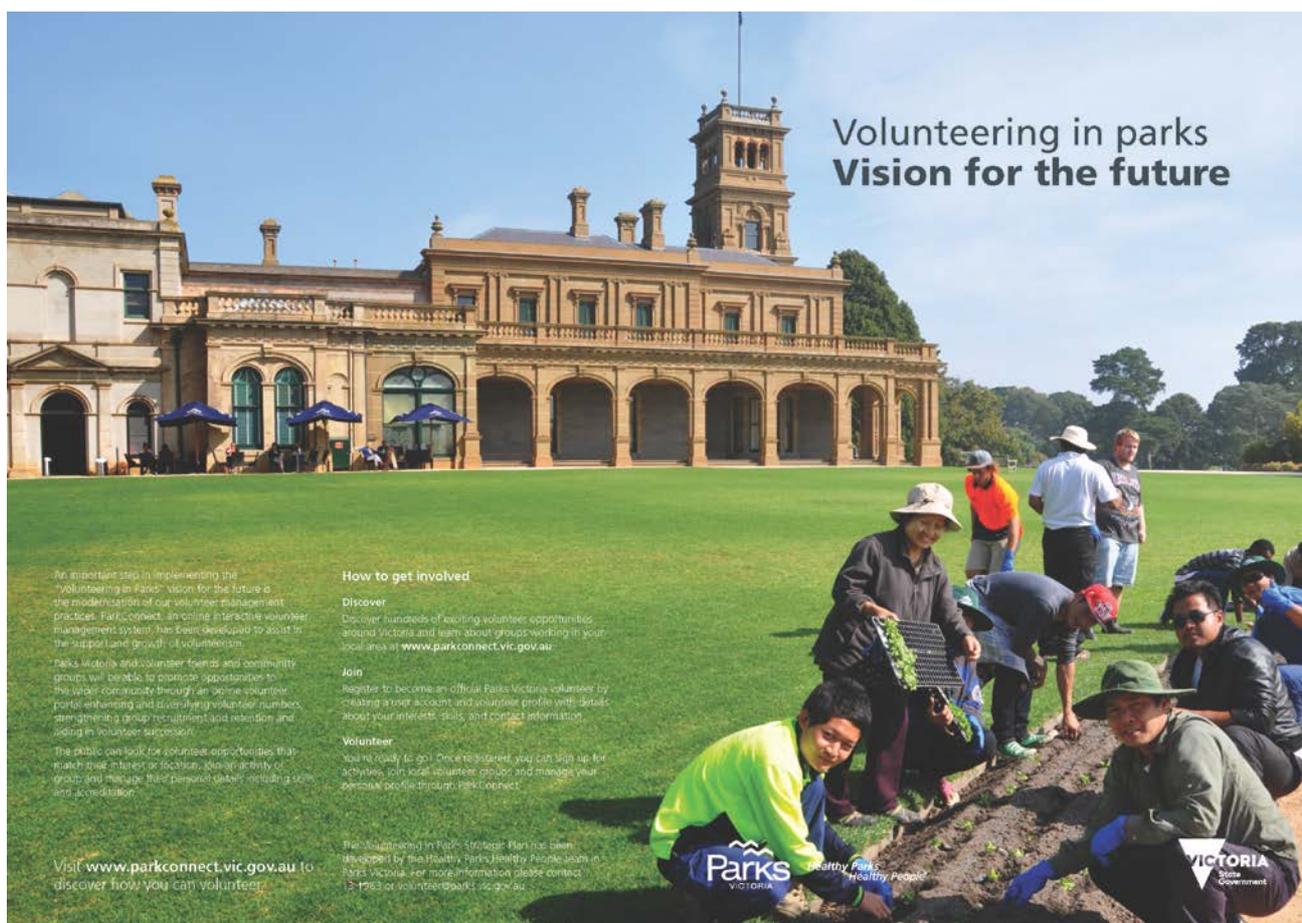
The Minister's Media release can be found here <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/celebrating-landcare-week-with-new-community-skills-development-grants/> and details of the grants, including the guidelines, here <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/grants/community-skills-development-grants> . Note that applications close on 12th October 2017, so make sure you get your application in quickly.

Volunteering in parks

Over the past two years Parks Victoria has been reviewing our approach to volunteering and the way in which we support our many volunteer partners. Volunteering is extremely important to Parks Victoria with volunteers contributing over 225,000 volunteer hours to park management each year. We also know volunteers, staff and the community benefit through skill building, exercise, social connections and improvements to physical and mental health, aligned with our Healthy Parks Healthy People approach to park management.

Parks Victoria is committed to a future which both supports our existing volunteers and seeks to build opportunities to reinvigorate, grow and diversify volunteering experiences that are innovative and inclusive. Parks Victoria aims to establish a world class approach to working with volunteers that is embedded within our core business and effectively engages and supports volunteers in safe, innovative and meaningful activities to improve the health of parks, the broader community and volunteers themselves.

Parks Victoria's renewed commitment has been communicated in the 'Volunteering in Parks' Vision for the Future which was released in May 2017.



This summary identifies our seven commitments to encourage volunteerism in parks and improve volunteer management and support including;

1. Parks Victoria is a Volunteer Management Agency
2. Safety of our volunteers and staff is our highest priority
3. Strengthen, extend and expand our current volunteer opportunities
4. Grow and diversify our volunteer population
5. Improve the governance and structure of volunteering to mitigate risks and enhance safety in addition to aligning to the National Standards of Volunteering
6. Create an enabling environment for volunteers, partners and community to engage; and
7. Promote staff and volunteer professionalism through development of skills and capacity building

The strength of existing volunteer partnerships and networks cannot be understated. Enhancing these relationships with transparent governance, capacity building and promoting leadership will create more opportunities and provide support. Our commitments will serve as a platform for further discussions to engage and strengthen relationships with our volunteer partners.

An exciting new initiative that Parks Victoria is currently working on with volunteer groups and partners is ParkConnect. ParkConnect is an important step in implementing the "Volunteering in Parks" Vision for the Future through the modernisation of our volunteer management practices. ParkConnect, an online interactive volunteer management system, has been developed to support and grow volunteerism.



Volunteers from Field Naturalists Ballarat and Great Dividing Trail Association after Park Connect training session

Parks Victoria and volunteer groups will be able to promote opportunities to the wider community through an online volunteer webpage, www.parkconnect.vic.gov.au; enhancing and diversifying volunteer numbers, strengthening group recruitment and retention, aiding in volunteer succession and providing results to celebrate and recognise successes. The public can look for volunteer opportunities that match their interests or locations, join an activity or group, and manage their personal details including skills and accreditations.

The Parks Victoria team are currently training volunteer group representatives in the use of ParkConnect. If you would like further information on “Volunteering in Parks” Vision for the Future or to sign up for a training session please contact volunteer@parks.vic.gov.au or visit <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/get-involved/volunteer> or call Parks Victoria’s Information Centre on 13 1963.

Leesa Riley

Parks Victoria, Statewide Volunteer Coordinator

VEFN Friends Groups Portraits 2017

VEFN has worked with many Friends Groups to develop portraits of their groups, activities and key achievements. These portraits have been a part of VEFN’s continuing dialogue about the contribution and importance of Friends Groups. Continuing our series, below is the profile of Friends of Westgate Park. All 11 profiles can be found on our website at bit.ly/friends-portraits.

Brief Description

Friends of Westgate Park (FoWP) has transformed the area over the last 15 years, from a run-down neglected park to the biodiverse habitat it is today. Westgate Park is on the eastern banks of the Yarra River, around and under Westgate Bridge and is in close proximity to the City of Melbourne. The 40 hectare park offers spectacular views to the mouth of the Yarra and the city skyline and opportunities to walk or cycle along the Yarra River or the Port Melbourne foreshore.



A view of Westgate Park c 1987



Westgate Park rich and biodiverse today

Key achievements

FoWP has achieved the transformation of the park in four key ways.

Transformed the Park from a weedy wasteland to a biodiverse gem. When FoWP started the park consisted of several garden beds planted out with very few species of native plants (mainly from WA) and weedy 'lawn' areas (rarely mowed). Today it features over 300 species of indigenous plants of the Sandbelt and other nearby regions set out in nine different plant communities from red gum woodland, heaths, grass lands to coast banksia woodlands. In addition to the lakes and dams created when the park was built, we have developed additional small wetlands. The way the group has set out the planting and the wetlands creates a feeling of being in the bush as you walk through the park.

Lobbying for additional land to be added to the Park. FoWP has successfully lobbied for an additional 8.7 hectares of unused land adjacent to the park to be incorporated. Unfortunately we also lost some land to the Webb Dock development making a net gain of 7.8 hectares. In an era when loss of public open space is often the norm, FoWP is particularly proud of this achievement.

Forming successful partnerships and capacity building. FoWP's success has relied on significant partnerships formed with numerous organisations. These include: Federal Departments of Environment & Energy; Employment and Infrastructure & Regional Development; State Departments and agencies such as DELWP; Port of Melbourne Corporation; Parks Victoria and the Fishermans Bend taskforce; the Cities of Melbourne & Port Phillip; Port Phillip EcoCentre; Landcare Australia; St Kilda Indigenous Nursery Cooperative; Conservation Volunteers Australia; Greening Australia and other Friends groups; Sacred Heart (Outlandish Program) and companies such as Holden, Telstra, ANZ, NAB, Victorian International Container Terminals and Melbourne International Roll on Roll off Auto Terminal.

FoWP hosted a well-attended urban biodiversity forum in 2013 and partnered with the City of Melbourne and Museum Victoria for the Bioblitz in 2014 and 2016. The group conducts monthly bird surveys and WaterWatch.

Over the last six years, the Port of Melbourne has been developing Webb Dock, adjacent to the park. FoWP worked very closely with the Port to ensure good outcomes for the park through assisting them with their plant lists for planting within the Port (to complement Westgate Park's vegetation), and supporting their plans for a landscape connection

between the Yarra River and the Port Melbourne foreshore. Most importantly, FoWP negotiated the transfer of additional land along the Yarra River from the Port to the park.

FoWP also work closely with neighbouring businesses including Holden who provide us with a vehicle on permanent loan.

FoWP has proved that its own people are its best asset. The group relies very much on the volunteers who donate so much of their time and skills in making the park better. These skills range from performing on-ground work, organising work teams, liaising with other organisations and to providing support to those needing it. Community groups like FoWP attract a wide cross section of the community including people with special needs.



Working with schools and partner, the Port Phillip EcoCentre – the wonder of waterbugs from the freshwater lake November 2015



Corporate groups enjoy a day out of the office September 2016

FoWP's work-for-the-voice program attracts a large number of participants (at times over 20 people) and is instrumental in delivering many projects and in carrying out maintenance. FoWP has formed partnerships with government agencies (jobactive) who provide very positive feedback on the group's ability to manage this diverse workforce. FoWP has also hosted the Green Army in its many forms over the years.

Successful completion of major projects. FoWP has conceived several major projects and also been responsible for their design, on-ground project management and securing the funding required. The implementation of these 20 major projects has led to the transformation of the park over the last 15 years. Significant projects include: substantial revegetation works; development of frog habitat; construction of boundary fences, roads and tracks; pest management works and many projects to sustain site water supply.

How the Group Achieved These Outcomes

FoWP has achieved the transformation of the park due to a unique combination of four factors:

Westgate Park was an unrecognised opportunity. The area of the park was once part of the sandy, swampy delta of the Yarra River – a habitat rich in flora and fauna. The place has been transformed many times since European settlement including being the construction site for the Westgate Bridge in the 1970s. After the Bridge opened, over thirty years ago, the Park was created with lakes, a network of paths and undulating landforms. It was planted with a limited number of native species, none local, and largely neglected for some time. A small group of enthusiastic people formed the Friends of Westgate Park 17 years ago. Their vision was to again transform it, this time to a highly biodiverse bushland setting using 300 locally indigenous 'sandbelt' plant species. They developed a plan for the park using nine distinct plant communities known to have existed close to the CBD. This included grasslands, redgum woodlands, heath, and saltmarsh. FoWP began the massive task of weeding, mulching and planting. To complete that plan will take several more years. In 2016 a Master Plan was commissioned by Parks Victoria that endorsed the FoWP's revegetation approach.

The formation of a Friends group consisting of dedicated individuals with excellent complementary skills has been instrumental in achieving the transformation of the park. FoWP consists of people with skills, knowledge and experience in landscape design and implementation, indigenous plants, nursery, project and financial management and social media. They are strong and effective advocates for the park, and have been successful in having about 8 hectares of land added to the park over time, including land along the Yarra River bank. They have fostered good working relations with government, the park managers (Parks Victoria) and the Port of Melbourne, and work closely with Landcare and a large number of corporations, enabling them to think strategically about what is required and how to achieve it. The Committee of Management includes people who have served in Federal Parliament, local government (in councils adjacent to the site) and business.

Ability to attract significant funds. The work FoWP carries out day by day is only possible with adequate funding. In the last ten years, the group has spent \$1.17 million in the park on a wide range of projects. FoWP receives no on-going government funding; income is derived from corporations and government grants (local, state and Commonwealth). The majority of corporate funds comes via Landcare Australia. FoWP has been successful in this area because it has a good story to tell, creating biodiversity in an urban park and has consistently delivered on its projects.

Ability to harness a large voluntary work force. Volunteer hours of approximately 1,500 each month equate to employing 9-10 full time employees. These hours have been maintained consistently over a 10 year period. FoWP account for around 10% of the total volunteer hours recorded by Parks Victoria. By properly organising this work force FoWP has successfully delivered many projects in addition to maintaining the park. Volunteers come from our own membership (currently around 50), work-for-dole participants fulfilling their mutual obligations, corporate volunteers, welfare organisations looking for a worthwhile activity for those often marginalised in the community and school groups. Corporate volunteers have proved a real winner as companies support their staff contributing to community groups during working hours as well as providing funding. FoWP is able to accommodate these volunteers by having full day activities each Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday throughout the year and the third Sunday of the month (again all day). The group frequently conducts activities on other days should that be required. The group employs a part time and casual team leader to run these activities. The demographic profile of volunteers varies: FoWP's own volunteers tend to be retirees, although some younger people volunteer on Sundays. Work-for-dole people and corporate volunteers can be any age.



Pigface spreads throughout areas of the park and provides important ground cover and colour

FoWP has achieved these outcomes by taking on many of the park management responsibilities. The group has been able to do this for many reasons outlined above. The major factors are the group's competent and skilled people and financial security. To some extent, the second factor follows the first. Demonstrating a capacity to perform and deliver outcomes provides confidence to prospective donors. The group also places an appropriate emphasis on working safely in all the projects and activities undertaken in the park reflecting a sound safety record.

Friends of Westgate Park is an Incorporated Association registered with Consumer Affairs Victoria.
For more information: <http://www.westgatepark.org/> .

Wetland plant identification

In order to manage or restore a wetland you first have to thoroughly understand it. Wetland plant species, condition and placement within a wetland can inform you as to what is going on.

The species and abundance of wetland plants can indicate what the hydrology of the wetland is currently or once was. For example standing large dead Red Gums, as seen in thousands of hectares of wetlands in north-western Victoria (see Photo 1), indicate that the hydrology and/or groundwater level has been changed. This can be caused by either too much flooding, in which case the Red Gums drown (many wetlands have had their outlet blocked and water level kept high for storage/irrigator use) or too little flooding in which case the Red Gums literally die of thirst (where wetlands have been cut off from their flood source and are starved of water). High saline groundwater levels may also play a role in the death of trees, caused by hydrological changes at a catchment level from vegetation clearing and/or poor irrigation practices.



Photo 1: Intermittent Swampy Woodland, Drowned Red Gums at Third Reedy Lake, Kerang.

The duration, depth and frequency of flooding will determine what species the wetland will support during a particular flooding event. For example a ring or large patch of Old Man Weed (*Centipeda cunninghamii*) (Photo 2) tells you that a wetland has been flooded and then dried out or a high cover of the summer growing weed Water Couch (**Paspalum distichum*) (Photo 3) indicates prolonged summer inundation (possibly caused by artificial changes in hydrology).



Photo 2: Old Man Weed (*Centipeda cunninghamii*) tells you that a wetland has been flooded and then dried out.



Photo 3: Water Couch (**Paspalum distichum*) indicates prolonged summer inundation (possibly caused by artificial changes in hydrology).

The Australian climate is the most variable on earth which has resulted in our wetlands being one of the most changeable environments in Australia. Wetlands can be inundated either semi-permanently, seasonally (regularly, almost every year), intermittently (up to 3 out of every 10 years) or episodically (irregularly less than 3 out of every 10 years). Wetland inundation levels occur in phases ranging from totally dry to filling, full and then to drying. Each of these phases often have a totally different suite of wetland plants, each uniquely adapted to their environment.

For example, *Cycnogeton* (formerly known as *Triglochin*) species, or Water Ribbons, are very important Aboriginal food plants. The presence of Water Ribbons leaves indicate that a wetland is inundated by around 30 cm to a meter of water at least intermittently (Photo 4). When the wetland is dry the Water Ribbons die back to a cluster of tubers (Photo 5), where they can remain for up to 30-40 years and other species of mudflat or terrestrial plants will grow in their place! Then when the wetland is filling the leaves of the Water Ribbons in their need to get light can stretch and grow very rapidly, and whatever mudflat or terrestrial species that were growing in their place will drown.



Photo 4: Water Ribbons leaves indicate that a wetland is inundated by around 30 cm to a meter of water at least intermittently.

Photo 5: Water Ribbons die back to a cluster of tubers, where they can remain for up to 30-40 years in a wetland dry phase.

Without a thorough understanding of what drives the ecology of a wetland, management actions may end up causing more harm than good. Wetland plant identification is more challenging than terrestrial vegetation because you go to the same spot only to find a complete change of species, and you get your feet wet!

For effective management, it is critical to have an understanding of wetland ecology of which wetland plant identification is a key part. By increasing these skills comes an increasing understanding of what is needed to restore wetlands, or what response management changes are having i.e. from environmental watering. So grab your gum boots and get out there!

Wetland ecologists Damien Cook and Elaine Bayes are committed to communicating effective wetland management. To meet this end they run a three-day Wetland Plant Identification Course, and a 2-4 day Wetland Ecology and Management course both commencing in October 2017. The wetland plant identification runs on 3 separate days, over a 6-month period from spring to autumn. Each day will focus on a different wetland habitat (water's edge, deep marsh and mudflat) and be timed so as to follow the wetting and drying of the stunning Reedy Lagoon at Gunbower Island and nearby wetlands.

Other Rakali Wetland Courses coming up are:

- NEW Wetland Ecology and Management Units (2 days each):

1. Wonderful Wetland Ecological Drivers Tour, 12 & 13 October 2017
 2. Wetland Restoration and Management, 16 & 17 November 2017
- Wetland Plant Identification, commences October 2017.

More information is at the website; <http://rakali.com.au/education-and-training>. Or call Elaine on 0431959085.

Free tree guards

250 green flexible plastic tree guards available for free - pick up in Greensborough (Briar Hill).

Used, but cleaned, not perfect but perfectly functional. Approx. 430mm high, 700mm circumference (220mm diameter). 3 stakes needed.

Contact Graham Patterson. Phone 03 94320163 or grahampatterson@bigpond.com.

Victorian cash for containers campaign

Friends Groups may like to indicate their support for a Victorian Cash for Containers Scheme. The Boomerang Alliance is currently running a campaign and you can sign up here other environmental groups have already done so. Discarded containers are a major problem in our waterways as these photos show.

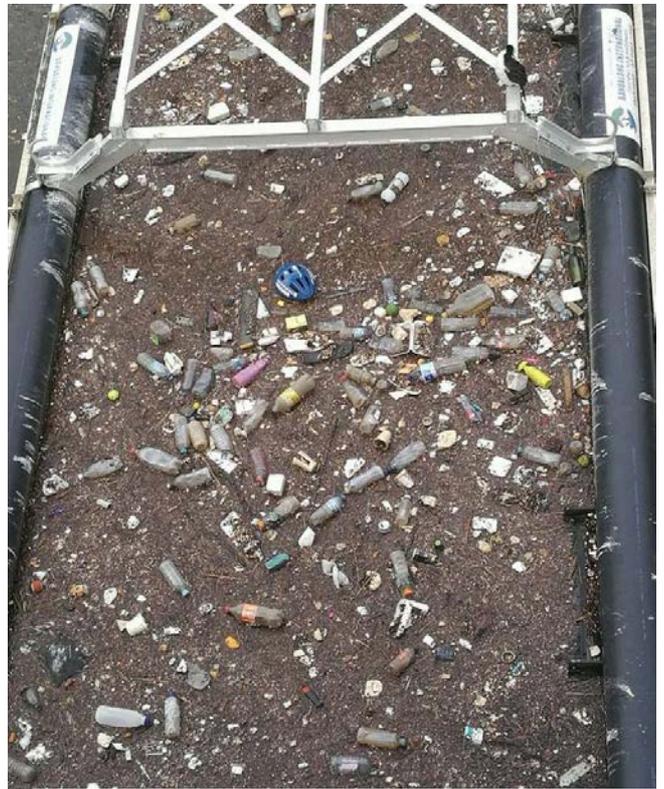


Litter in Yarra River near Dights Falls.
Photo credit: Annett Finger.

You can also find more information through Australians for Refunds on Cans and Bottles www.afrocab.org.au. Your support is vital to help convince the state government to introduce this much needed litter reform. Without this every year millions of drink containers will continue to litter our waterways and roadsides.

A Container Deposit Scheme (or CDS) will, as the South Australian experience has shown, have many environmental benefits. It will also result in about \$50 million per year of potential charity income for Victorian charities and community groups, (according to the Boomerang Alliance). NSW will introduce their CDS on December 1st. With the help of Friends Groups the Victorian Government could be convinced to do the same.

Peter Cook



Litter trap near Webb Bridge, Yarra River.
Photo credit: Beach Patrol 3207.

Articles for FriendsNET

Suggestions for articles for FriendsNET are welcome. Please email to friendvic@hotmail.com or to the Secretary, Stephen Derrick at ecosystems@bigpond.com. If you want to include photos, please send separately as high resolution jpeg images, preferably in landscape format if possible.