

GVEG 2016 Presidents Report.

Goulburn Valley Environment Group (GVEG) has had a very busy year, a year of highs and lows, a year in which we celebrated our group's 25th anniversary on a very high note at King Billy Retreat, Rushworth. However it was also a year we locally lost further endangered vegetation and a year we encountered a very hostile Federal Government and Senate committee.

The past year also saw the completion of two projects under the banner of **GV21**, which had support from the Federal Government and sponsorship from local government and industry. **The GV21 vision** is to bring together key productive service industries, commerce and the community to form a 'regional cluster' of cooperation that would see the Goulburn Valley recognised globally as a centre of innovation. The vision is based on the belief that the foundation of a strong regional economy is a group of clusters, not a collection of unrelated firms. Benefits flow from clusters which involve closer working relationships between similar or related enterprises.

GV21 delivered on this vision, in partnership with the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GBCMA) with a Symposium in Shepparton in November 2015, for the region's business and community leaders, Government Ministers and Departmental heads. The Symposium featured internationally renowned speakers - Professor Ross Garnaut, a Professorial Research Fellow in Economics at the University of Melbourne, Professor James Clark, Chair and Director of the Green Chemistry Centre of Excellence at the University of York U.K. and Ifor Ffowcs-Williams, CEO of Cluster Navigators Ltd (New Zealand).

The GV21 series also included 3 Forums under the banner of Closed Loops, Clusters and Co-operatives.

The Kilter Rural Story, held at Kyabram, reviewed the amalgamation of many small unproductive farms into largescale landscape change in the Kerang area and how it may relate to abandoned irrigation properties in the GV.

Madowla Park, Field Day was a study of closed loop farming production featuring bio-fuel production, and a diverse range of connected business activities increasing efficiencies into the future.

Other speakers were, Steven Hobbs, BE Bioenergy, who spoke about trialling different oilseed crops, improving soil, the use of seed oil and bioenergy, and Peter Brown, Seasol, speaking on adding nutrients/biostimulants to soils.

Co-operatives in rural Victoria

Terry Hehir, board chairman of Organic Dairy Farmers Australia Co-op and chairman of Waterpool Co-op and **Les Cameron**, Chairman of the Goulburn Valley Food Co-operative presented at Latrobe University Shepparton Campus, the advantages and features of co-operatives in business and regional development in our local region.

The series of three events attracted a wide range of participants including representatives from agricultural industries, local Government, Government Departments, Water and CMA Authorities and Politicians.

The GVEG initiative of bringing together all local environment groups has continued in the past year. These meetings have proven good value in bringing all groups up-to-date and jointly pursuing actions. Groups include Landcare Network, River Connect, GSCC, Beneath the Wisteria, Transition Tatura, Slap Tomorrow, G.V. Community Energy & GVEG.

GVEG has been active in advocating for the Murray Darling Basin Plan including as a member of the Lifeblood Alliance (an alliance of environmental groups from across the basin), a submission to the Inquiry into the Water Amendment Bill 2015 and a submission to **Senate Select Committee on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan**.

The Senate committee held a session in Shepparton which GVEG joined with Environment Victoria (EV), Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Environmental Farmers Network (EFN) to present evidence in what proved to be a volatile and hostile encounter. Unfortunately, locally GVEG has been deliberately excluded from the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District *Water* Leadership Forum headed by Shepparton MP *Suzanna Sheed* which has no environmental inputs independent of government.

The inquiry by House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment into the financial governance and behaviour of environmental groups qualifying for tax deductibility brought into question GVEG's right to advocate politically for environmental policy. This was a thinly veiled attempt to silence environmental criticism of projects that have wider national implications such as threats to the barrier Reef, Galilee Basin/ Adani mine and coal seam gas and fracking.

The removal of feral horses from the Barmah National Park has been a GVEG priority for many years and continues to be a highly debated issue. Unfortunately Parks Victoria is still in the "consultation" phase with little if any change over the past decade. GVEG remains determined to achieve an outcome that protects the wetlands, Moira Grass plains and the huge public investment in environmental watering programs.

Local Government Planning applications for both McKenzie Rd, North Mooroopna & Boundary Rd. Congupna have both been either seriously questioned or objected to by GVEG. This not a popular pastime for GVEG and I find it disappointing that current State regulations offer little protection for the significant, endangered, old large trees targeted in both planning applications. These objections are time consuming, time that we would much rather be spending actively promoting sustainable development practices. In many cases Industry appears determined to overlook cleared ex irrigation land and seek permits to remove vegetation retained by past generations in semi virgin situations.

GVEG has been actively contributing to the **State governments Review of the Native vegetation Clearing Regulations Consultation Paper** both in a consultation forum and with a submission highlighting the serious flaws of the current regulations as they relate on- ground in the Goulburn Valley.

Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC) advertised two strategies for comment, the Draft Urban Forest Strategy, and the Draft Victoria Park Lake Masterplan. GVEG has responded to both in detail

and awaits further opportunities to work with local government to maximise the outcomes of these strategies.

We are also partnering GSCC in the Activities in the Park series of events with Ramble the Reedy, a celebration of World Wetland day in Feb next year.

An area of concern for GVEG over many years has been the loss of vegetation during and post bushfires. GVEG, together with the Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network initiated a meeting with all emergency and other organisations involved in bushfire response. The meeting reviewed responses to the Creighton's Creek and Stewarton fires, the disappointing loss of native vegetation during the mop-up and recovery stages, the utilisation of fallen timber and evolving organisational responsibility during these incidents. The outcome will be the development of a best practice document to be developed with input from all parties prior to the 2016 fire season.

As a lasting record of GVEG's first 25 years we plan the production of a history booklet. GVEG is advanced in seeking grant funding for the production to celebrate the group's history and its links to local partnering organisations.

Those following GVEG on our website will have notice an upgrade of the site and a monthly freshening taking place. The servicing of social media is very much a challenge for many of us but we are determined to improve our performance in this area.

I wish to record GVEG's appreciation of Goulburn Murray Landcare Network for the use of their office for our monthly meetings and our many operational partners including GBCMA and GSCC.

My appreciations goes to our GVEG office bearers and committee, for their inputs and support which I and GVEG are totally dependent on, and our unsung members who represent GVEG on GBCMA, Parks Victoria, GSCC and other committees.

I encourage members, friends or visitors to join with us for our monthly meetings, which are held on the 3rd Friday of the month at 12.00pm, corner Wyndham & Knight, Shepparton.

John Pettigrew

15/9/2016