

Woodend and Five Mile Creek Landcare Group

PO Box 297 Woodend VIC 3442

TO: THE SECRETARY

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS
AND TRANSPORT
P.O. BOX 6100
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

August 11 2008

Dear Madam/Sir,

Please find attached a submission by the Woodend & Five Mile Creek Landcare group to the Senate Inquiry into NRM and Conservation Challenges.

The wider issues of some of the terms of reference are outside our area of expertise. We comment only on the terms of reference which touch on the Caring for our Country program, and on what we see as a danger that, in the rush to fund "National Projects", the importance of funding local community-based projects will be neglected and even perhaps ignored.

It is a shame that some consultation with "grass-roots" (literally!) groups could not have been done before the first funding round was announced, giving groups only one month to put in applications for funding, if they thought they might qualify. It is also a shame that so little attention was given to explaining some of the implications of Caring for our Country for small groups.

Finally, we are amazed at the failure to advise Landcare groups that a Senate Inquiry had been set up. Perhaps there were ads in newspapers? Certainly, the organizations we depend on for keeping us informed, the Catchment Management Authority and Landcare Australia, don't seem to have found it possible to do so.

In addition to our submission, I attach two sections of our Annual Report for your further information.

I am
Yours truly
Jo Clancy,
President WFMC LCG



Secretary: Gareth Ogilvie (03) 5427 2845



SUBMISSION BY
WOODEND & FIVE MILE CREEK
LANDCARE GROUP
TO
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT

- GENERAL

Woodend is in the Macedon Ranges Shire, Victoria, about 70 kms north-west of Melbourne, on the Calder Freeway. The Shire has a population of about 38,360 (ABS Census 2006), with a mainly semi-rural lifestyle. In recent years, broad-acre farming has decreased, particularly in the southern parts of the Shire which border Melbourne. There is a wide range of Landcare Groups within the Shire, and some of them, including ours, are quite small.

- OUR GROUP

The group has been in operation for nearly 20 years, and is a combination of two original groups, the Friends of Five Mile Creek and Woodend Landcare. Typically of many community groups, it has waxed and waned in membership and in degree of activity, but in the last six years has been very active.

Over this period cash grants have been received from Bundaberg Rum Bush Fund (one project) and the Natural Heritage Trust Envirofund (two further projects).

Other support, in cash and in kind, has been provided by the North Central Catchment Management Authority, by the Shire Council, and by several individual councillors.

Local community involvement in working bees has been very strong, and approval for our work is widely expressed.

The result of this funding and work has been the clearing and revegetation of more than two kilometers of badly degraded creek bank, and the planting of at least 12,000 plants of local species.

The creek banks are mostly public land, but we are pleased to note that on at least three places where private ownership extends to the water's edge the owners are taking pains to improve their properties. The Five Mile Creek is the southernmost tributary of the Campaspe River, joining it just outside Woodend township. The Campaspe then flows North through Central Victoria until it reaches the Murray River at Echuca.

- **SMALL COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS**

We don't set ourselves up as being the ideal group – for there is no such thing. We do declare, however that the experience of a group like ours is an excellent example of what can be achieved by funding small community-based projects. There will be many other such stories to be told among all the Landcare groups in Australia. I have attached our 2008 President's Report, and the report of the sub-committee which managed our most recent "Black Gum Rescue Stage 3" Project. These reports show the extent of our work on public land around several parts of Woodend. They tell the story of an Envirofund grant of less than \$27,000, which resulted in the clearing of about 1 hectare of land, including an abandoned tip and a veritable "jungle" of willows, poplars, elms and other weeds, and the planting of 3000 indigenous plants. The story includes the involvement of local businesses, Service Clubs, two Primary Schools, and more than 1400 documented hours of voluntary work.

This is what can be achieved when the community works together, with a basis of quite a small amount of Government funding.

- **CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY**

On this group's reading, we fear the massive change to the previous funding system in that the "Caring for our Country" announcement appears to leave small groups such as ours struggling to obtain funds to do on-ground projects. National priorities and national projects are highly desirable outcomes to strive for. However the smaller, local projects are extremely important. They achieve good on-ground results, are much more likely to involve communities, and are excellent value-for-money. Besides, the notion that because a task is not being performed at a national level, it therefore is not of national importance, is pretty illogical. The task itself is the most important

thing to be assessed, and its outcome in its own context the second most important.

We believe it is vital for the future of Natural Resource Management that careful consideration be given to the funding of local-level projects. There are some hints in some of the NRM website literature that this may be done, but nothing is promised definitely in this “transitional” period.

Meanwhile, the smaller environmental groups are likely to become increasingly subject to fear and despondency as uncertainty about funding eats away their confidence.

We sincerely hope that the Committee will study this aspect of its Inquiry very seriously.

Submitted on behalf of the Committee and members,

Woodend & Five Mile Creek Landcare Group

Jo Clancy, President
August 11 2008

WOODEND & FIVE MILE CREEK LANDCARE GROUP

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

JULY 2007 – JUNE 2008

The year just passed has been in many ways very satisfactory, although as always not everything has gone exactly to plan. This is only to be expected for a community group composed of volunteers, dependant on public funding, and working with the natural environment.

Our main task this year was to bring the "Black Gum Rescue Stage 3" (the Envirofund Project) to fruition. Peter Yates's detailed report on this is included. A sub-committee of Peter, Kate Daniel, David Gossip, and Russell Cadman took responsibility for managing the Project, and did so very efficiently.

The 3000 or so plants that were put in on the banks of the Creek at the bottom of Wood St and Pyke St are growing with amazing vigour, and looking really good. We have heard many comments from our fellow citizens about the improvement that has been made to that site, which was virtually derelict four years ago.

Our only disappointment about the site was that the council was unable to find the funds to put crushed rock down on the paths which we had made, and to protect the several drains and culverts from erosion.

The ongoing work of general maintenance of the Creek banks was continued when time permitted, but that was not very often. We are concerned that the weeding of previous plantings has not been kept up as well as we would like, and are drawing up a Weed Control Plan. As is always the case, we are having excellent co-operation from Shire staff, Peter Jones, Lachlan Milne, and Ken Farmer. Some funds are also available to pay contractors to do some of the heaviest work; however we will still be counting on the voluntary support of our members and the community to do a lot of the work. Weeding isn't as attractive as planting things, but it is **very** important.

The Committee has discussed the matter of dog control in relation to the welfare of the animals that live in or near the Creek, and thanks to Peter Yates and George Riffkin, we have made a submission to the Council. This issue concerned us only in relation to the Creek, and we did not, as a group, comment on any other aspect of Council's policy proposals.

We continue to be involved, either formally or informally, in many of the things that happen around Woodend. For example, it's quite surprising how many of our

members are volunteers at the Visitor Information Centre! One of the Landcare members designed the pamphlet on the Five Mile Creek Walk, and also one on the Sporting Facilities of Woodend. This I find particularly interesting because it shows how vital the Creek is to the town's recreation facilities. Copies of these pamphlets are available here today. Trudy Shepherd and Christine Sullivan, who are the Visitor Information Officers, are both very much aware of the importance of the Creek to visitors and locals alike, and would be only too glad if we could extend the rehabilitation of the Creek, and the shared track, even further.

At present the shared track goes up to Romsey Rd, and shortly we hope Council will have completed the footbridge at that end so it can be opened. At the request of Landcare, the footbridge will be named the "David Currie Bridge" in honour of one of our former leading members and hardest workers, who died suddenly five years ago. Council has provided a plaque, and the Currie family will make arrangements to have it installed at an appropriate small ceremony – but only after the bridge is opened.

Tree planting continues to be popular with the children from Woodend Primary School and St Ambrose School, so once again they joined us to plant two special areas on the north bank of the Creek as part of the Envirofund Project. Later this year we're going to see if they can be as enthusiastic about pulling up weeds from those same areas. In April, the North Central Catchment Management Authority gave us two Wollemi Pines, to be presented to the schools as a thank you.

The Woodend Children's Park Committee has developed into a very successful organization, and is getting on at great speed with their plans. The site they have been allocated by Council is right next to our Black Gum Rescue Stage3, and we have shared a couple of working bees with them. Our two groups will continue to co-operate to achieve compatibility between our developments.

The problem of grey water discharge into the Creek appears at the moment to be insoluble, for the simple reason that no-one seems to have the authority to **order** householders to connect grey water discharge to the sewer system. At least, while we have been looking into it, no Government body or other organization has accepted this responsibility. When we have the time and energy we will try to take the matter further, but we fear it will take a lot of both! Meanwhile, grey water continues to pour into the Creek from dozens (at least) of homes and buildings.

Our "central" group has been augmented in recent years by a series of "sub-groups", each of which has a separate report included here.

You will all have noticed the amazing face-lift that's happened to **Newell Reserve**, from a dreary-looking, untidy bit of open ground, to an attractively planted area welcoming people to the town.

If you drive down Ashbourne Rd you'll pass the **Slatey Creek Black Gum Reserve** where another group of volunteers has been clearing and revegetating. They received a grant from the Catchment Authority for further work and will be planting there in September.

Quarry Rd Railway Reserve has also had a transformation, thanks to the work started by Bert Dawson and a couple of helpers three years ago. A few more helpers have joined in, and an Australia Post Grant has given further impetus to the group. It is now getting going on the other side of the railway line along Bawden Rd and Sullivans Rd – it seems Bert didn't have enough to do on just one side. No wonder the blighter had a heart attack!

There were some personal hardships for several of our members this year, in the form of deaths and illnesses, sometimes of close relatives, hospitalization for surgery, etc. Fortunately we didn't lose an actual member, though it came fairly close for Bert.

We are facing a period of uncertainty in the future, as there has been a major change in the way the Commonwealth Government funds environmental works. The first round of the "Caring for our Country" program was announced on July 3rd, with applications to be in by July 31st, a very difficult deadline.

Even more importantly, this funding is aimed at "networks" of groups, and will look favourably on "partnerships" with business. The guidelines are also particularly, but not exclusively, aimed at *national* projects dealing with *national* priorities. While these arrangements are said to be "transitional", we have no idea what they will "transition" into, and whether small Groups such as ours, especially those working on public land, will be eligible for funding of any sort.

So once again, instead of getting down to our real job of clearing weeds and planting new plants, we'll have to spend energy on lobbying for some scraps from the table of the big groups, or getting together with other groups – and business! - to form "networks". It's quite a laudable objective, I suppose, **but we haven't got time and energy to spare for that stuff!** Do I sound frustrated? You're darn right I do. If the Commonwealth isn't going to fund the small local groups, will the State pick up the difference? I wonder!

Anyway, after that bit of bad news comes the good. ***In April this year a platypus was sighted in the Five Mile Creek near the heart of town.***

The observers, two very reliable people, got a good look at it over some minutes. There have been other sightings of this very special animal over the years, but not for quite a while. Our group feels it can justifiably take great pride in this event, as the work of the last five years has undoubtedly improved the life and health of the Creek. That's not ignoring the earlier work going back 20 years.

We have invited Geoff Williams to speak to us today as he is one of Victoria's leading experts on platypus, and to give us both information about the animal itself, and guidelines for making the Creek an even better platypus habitat.

In concluding, I would like to pay tribute to the many people and organizations that have helped us, in many different ways. If I were to name individuals, I'd probably leave some out, so I'd best make a general list:

- Macedon Ranges Shire Councillors, especially the three from our own Ward. Each one has contributed cash grants or other help, from their Council allowances.
- Macedon Ranges Shire staff, especially those mentioned earlier, plus Barry Whelan, and many others.
- The two Primary Schools and their students, teachers and staff.
- The service clubs, Rotary and Lions, particularly the Lions who catered for two major planting days.
- Several businesses in Woodend who gave donations in kind.
- The three newspapers, who have given us excellent publicity.
- Our local community newsletter and its editor, Irene Hatcher.
- Our local community radio station, 100.7 FM.
- The Green Corps team led by Krista Patterson-Majoor.
- All the volunteers and other helpers who came to our working bees.
- The people of the town, who give us their support, and tell us how much they like what we're doing.
- Lastly, the Committee of the Woodend & Five Mile Creek Landcare Group which has worked so hard to keep the organization going all year .

We do it all for our little Creek, and for the water and plants and animals and air that it, and we ourselves, ultimately depend on. All of our projects are on public land and therefore are of direct and immediate benefit to our own community.

It is a worthwhile task, and generally one that makes us feel good even when we're caught up in the work, and feeling a few aches and pains.

**JO CLANCY
JULY 2008**

WOODEND & FIVE MILE CREEK LANDCARE GROUP
BLACK GUM RESCUE PROJECT STAGE 3

REPORT FOR 2008 AGM

Sub-committee

Peter Yates
Kate Daniel
Russ Cadman
David Gossip

Commenced work October 2006 after confirmation that a grant of just under \$30,000 had been approved.

Site Management Plan

Apart from numerous site inspections, we also arranged for aerial photos to be taken of the site by Bruce Hedge and commissioned Practical Ecology Pty Ltd to prepare a site management plan. This plan was received in its final form in April 2007.

Cultural Heritage

We attempted to make contact with representatives of the indigenous people in order to arrange a Cultural Heritage Survey. Despite much effort, we were unable to arrange for anyone to come to inspect the site. This aspect of the project caused an inordinate amount of wasted time and anxiety for our group. Having failed to find a way to get a survey done and with the time constraints of plant ordering and site preparation before the weather became too wet, we commenced work in 2007 without the survey. A map of a survey encompassing our site and arranged previously by Macedon Range Shire Council for another nearby project indicated one sensitive site but **not** in our work area.

The Site

Much of the 2.5 HA site was occupied by large piles of woodchips from an old poplar copse. These large piles of large chips were a major problem (more than 1,000 cubic metres). Relocating them was too expensive and not practical. Burning them had already been vetoed by the Macedon Ranges Shire Council. The North Central Catchment Management Authority required them to be incorporated into the surface to preclude them from being washed downstream in a flood event, the hope being that they would eventually rot away and actually improve the soil structure. There was also an old tip site which was inspected by the EPA and found to be safe, but needed to be covered over. We had to do our best to meet these not altogether complementary requirements by our various regulators and still operate within a limited budget and limited time frame.

We employed a local operator to spread the chips over the site and as far away from the creek edge as possible. He was also asked to mix the chips into the soil as much as possible. In addition he created an access track about 530 metres in length. This track, if completed will assist in future maintenance of the site and will also eventually become a cycle/walking track for the community. We did obtain verbal assurance from MRSC outgoing CEO and the Mayor that these works would be included in the 2008-9 budget, but that has failed to happen. This will make future weed control on the site much more difficult.

After the earthworks were completed, we commenced weed control works on the planting areas. This work involved spraying as well as cutting and painting larger weeds and continued until just prior to the first planting days in October 2007.

Plantings

In August 2007, groups of volunteers laid rolls of jute weed matting. At this time we also conducted a direct grass seeding trial of two plots, each of about 100 square metres. One was of exotic ryegrass and the other was of local Poa. The aim of the ryegrass planting was to see if it would suppress the growth of thistles and other broad-leaf weeds pending further revegetation with indigenous species. The ryegrass trial was partially successful despite dry conditions. The native Poa trial was a failure and we have now decided that planting plugs or tubes is the preferred method for Poa.

In early October 2007, 41 volunteers plus a further 6 from the local Lions Club (catering) planted the first 1138 plants. These were planted in three ways. Some in the jute rolls, some with individual jute mats and tree guards and some with milk carton guards. In mid-October the second planting day attracted 52 volunteers and a further 1600 plants were installed. Later in October, both our local primary schools sent a total of 76 students and parents who planted another 300 plants.

Field Day

On 21st October 2007 we conducted a Field Day overlooking the site which included a site inspection and a talk on macro-invertebrates in the creek. This was attended by 26 people and was most informative.

Follow Up Work

Unfortunately, our area had a very dry spring and it was necessary to do follow up waterings of the plantings using a water tank on a trailer. This was quite labour intensive, but the results have been excellent with a success rate of over 95%. Five months after planting, some tube plants have attained 2 metres in height.

A lot of follow up maintenance has already been conducted, including the use of a team of people from Corrections Victoria who installed milk carton guards to some plants.

Due to some cost savings, we applied successfully for a variation which allowed us to purchase an additional 350 plants and associated mats and guards. These were installed in April 2008 over two days using a team of 11 young people from Green Corps. We conducted a training session and provided background notes for this group. Due to lack of creek water, these plantings had to be watered again using a tanker. Early indications are that this planting was not as successful as the Spring plantings due to the onset of frost and again a lack of rain. The survival rate appears to be about 70% compared to more than 95% for the Spring plantings. We have decided to avoid Autumn plantings in future.

Achievements

The achievements on this site are many. Compared to its condition in 2006, the following has been accomplished:

- Large areas of woody weeds eradicated.
- Large volume of wood chips spread and incorporated into soil to prevent washing downstream.
- About 3,500 indigenous plants established, mainly along the creek edge but also some away from the creek.
- Old tip site covered and protected with some tree plantings over it.
- Access track roughed.
- Accurate map produced of site
- Aerial photos before and after project

Apart from the obvious site improvements, there were many other positive outcomes for the community. These included the involvement of many sectors of the community such as:

- primary classes from both local schools
- people on Community Based Orders
- Green Corps team
- A large number of volunteers of all ages.

As well as this, there was a useful Field Day and we have also produced the first accurate map of the site and a set of before and after aerial photos. Thanks again to Bruce Hedge who did the second set free.

Administration and Coordination

Finally, we found that apart from the “physical” side of the project, the organization and administration consumed a huge number of manhours. The total volunteer manhours spent came to nearly 1,400 of which much was organizational work as opposed to working bees. A variation request was approved, allowing the payment of some of the administration component of our grant to our sub-committee as “Project Managers”. We felt that this was appropriate as otherwise there would seem to have been a discrepancy between

allowing funds to be spent for on-ground works as opposed to paying people for equal or greater hours of organizational work. Our sub-committee has donated their payments back to the Landcare Group and the money will be used for a small planting project near the High Street bridge this Spring. Currently there is a remaining balance of unspent grant funds of \$1,109.73 which will be repaid to Envirofund when they send an invoice.

Financial Summary to 20th July 2008

Grant from Envirofund 24/11/06	\$26,676.47
Bank Interest	\$139.88
Total receipts	\$26,816.35
Expenditure	
Photos (ground and aerial)	\$150.60
Tools (Hamilton planters, weed wands, herbicide)	\$497.72
Consultant for project plan	\$1,320.00
Earthmoving	\$6,600.00
Weed removal and spraying	\$4,523.00
Jute rolls and pins	\$3,932.83
Individual jute mats, guards	\$1,930.50
Plants	\$3,801.10
Audit	\$300.00
Out of pocket admin (flyers, posters, phone, postage etc)	\$651.25
Project management fees (donated back to group)**	<u>\$1,999.62</u>
Total expenditure	\$25706.62
Balance remaining (to be repaid to Envirofund)	\$1109.73

Fully detailed information available on request to Peter Yates

** Envirofund approved the payment to our sub-committee of up to \$20 per manhour to run the project. In fact, the sub-committee put in over 400 manhours, so their payment amounted to less than \$5 per hour. All of this money was donated back to the group. Some of it will be used for the small planting project we are doing this Spring on the creek banks where the Platypus was spotted, near the Information Centre. **So this project will cost the group nothing.**

I would like to give a big vote of thanks to all those who contributed to the success of this project, including many Landcare members and in particular the sub-committee of Kate Daniel, Russ Cadman and David Gossip. Together with the local community, this project has been a great success and will provide a framework for this area in the future as the trees grow. We will need to keep pressure on the council to upgrade the track through the area and one day we also hope to link the track to the track on the northern side by means of a bridge. In the meantime, weed control will be a huge challenge for our limited resources.

We will be using some funds from the 2nd Generation Landcare grant to conduct weed control over the next year and will also schedule some working bees.

Peter Yates 20/7/08