

Swan Bay Environment Association Inc.



P.O. Box 143, Queenscliff 3225
Reg. No: A 00 1 7279 U
home.vicnet.net.au/~sbea

NEWSLETTER NO. 58 –March 2011

President's Report to AGM March 2011 Introduction

It is a pleasure and honour to present my report to you tonight. Of course, the report really belongs to the Committee because it records our work over the last year and reflects our views on matters that impact on Swan Bay. I would like to take a few minutes to talk about our achievements in 2010 and what the Association might be doing in 2011.

The Nursery

I have seen the town of Queenscliff described as the “Jewel in the Crown” of the Bellarine Peninsula. Well, the Nursery is certainly the Association’s “jewel”. Volunteers come every Wednesday and other times in the month to grow indigenous seedlings which then find their way into all sorts of places around our locality. In the last year, the Nursery produced over 8000 seedlings and they were purchased by organizations such as Parks Victoria and the local council. The seedlings are grown from seeds and cuttings sourced locally. The Nursery holds some 30,000 plants of over 100 species. In the last month, almost 20 people have turned up on the mid-week planting days. This is extraordinary and an outstanding example of community activity! We think we are pretty good and last year nominated ourselves for a Parks Victoria Environment and Sustainability Award. Unfortunately we didn’t win, so there must be some other fantastic community environmental organizations out there, which is very encouraging.

2010 Activities

I have selected a couple of issues to illustrate some of the little ‘behind the scenes’ activities of the Association – things

that don’t make the headlines, but nevertheless are important.

Poisonous shell grit

During the year, we received an interesting communication from Queensland about birds dying apparently from consuming shellgrit sourced from the Point Lonsdale area. This was of course of great interest to us because of the proposed inflow of water into Swan Bay. Could contaminants from the Stockland site find their way into the Bay? We sought professional opinion from a friend of the Association. A comparison with background levels and some reasonable speculation eventually enabled us to satisfy ourselves that it was likely to be a rogue contamination and therefore not a problem.

Environmental Effects Statements Inquiry

Thanks to Felicity Thyer, the Association made a submission to the Victorian Government Inquiry into the EES process . We made two main points resulting from our experience with the Channel Deepening enquiry and Stocklands. Firstly, we don’t like the fact that companies who are required to provide these environmental effects statements pick the consultants who do them, and secondly that public input seems to have little effect on the final outcome. The Association has a small voice but it is important that we speak up when we get the chance.

Swans on the Bay

Several people have commented that there seem to be fewer swans on our beautiful Swan Bay in recent times. The swans come to feed in Swan Bay and are a vital part of its ecosystem, so we are concerned if they do not appear in their usual numbers. A few

enquiries have eased our anxiety – at least for the time being. Our DPI source suggested that the excessive rain this year has created alternative water bodies for the swans to use and that they are ‘holidaying’ elsewhere.

Stocklands

One of the issues that continues to worry us is the Stockland development. Our position is well-known. We think it is inappropriate for a large housing estate to be built on land that connects internationally recognized wetlands. What particularly alarms us is that the water from the proposed artificial canal system will eventually find its way into Swan Bay. We have discovered that the Department of Primary Industry, located on the edge of Swan Bay, has not monitored the quality of water in Swan Bay since 2004. The Association, along with the Point Lonsdale Coastal Spaces Group, will be doing everything we can to ensure that Stockland meet the Water Quality requirements of the Minister’s Determination.

The Association

The Association continues to be an example of a thriving community environmental organization. On the positive side, we have a good healthy bank balance, a dedicated team of volunteers who love coming to work at the Nursery and stable membership of around 80 people and a committee who meet for an hour or so every month. We also have a great website, which is updated regularly thanks to the generosity of Doug Miller. How many community organizations would like to swap places with us?

We currently have only one problem that we need to deal with and it is potentially quite serious. After this AGM, the Committee will find itself without a quorum to conduct the business of the Association. We have tried placing advertisements in the community papers and we have tried speaking to people individually but with only limited success. We have one new committee member to replace the three who are standing down. If

this position continues the Committee will not be able to function. I do not want to speculate what that would mean for the future of the Association. So, please if you love Swan Bay and have a little time to spare, come and see me at the end of tonight. No experience is required.

Thanks

One of the pleasant things of presenting the President’s report is to publicly thank the people who have made the Association work so effectively through the last year. We have several committee members who are not re-nominating and I would like to thank them for their work. Anne Barclay and Linda Waters are not re-nominating for 2011. Linda stepped up to be the Secretary with great professionalism. Mia Cooke has been our Treasurer for several years and will be stepping down from this position, although she will remain on the Committee. Special thanks, of course, go to Jill Warneke, once again for her tireless efforts at the Nursery and to all those volunteers who make it such a wonderful community enterprise.

And finally ...

We are all aware of the importance of Swan Bay as a fish nursery for Port Phillip Bay, and also as a stopover for migrating birds as they travel the world. However, to me it is the changes faces of Swan Bay - whether it is a spectacular sunset, its steely grey appearance on a winter’s day or that mirror-look on a rare calm day – these are the things that are so valued. How lucky are we to live with Swan Bay on our doorstep? Let’s hope Swan Bay has a good year and many to follow. The Association, I am sure, will play its part in this.

Bob Fuller, President, SBEA

Next Newsletter

Also at the AGM Beth Ross, from the Gordon Tafe, presented a very informative talk entitled “Habitat values of local vegetation”. A summary of this talk will be given in the next Newsletter.