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What's 'The Point' of all the Secrecy, Moremac? (*Greg Parry*)

When the Federal Minister for Environment, Peter Garrett, approved the canal-style Stocklands development at Point Lonsdale in 2009 there were many conditions placed on the construction of stages 4-14. These stages involved the construction of the canal system and some 400+ houses. As this part of development is now proceeding apace we might expect the conditions to have been met by the current developer, Moremac. Have they?

The conditions imposed by the Minister included many intended to maintain the water quality in Lakers Cutting and the adjacent Swan Bay Marine Park. There was a requirement for a minimum of 13 months of water quality monitoring and detailed modelling of water quality. The modelling needed to demonstrate that the discharge from the canal system would not result in a net annual increase in nutrient and sediment discharge into Lakers Cutting, and this modelling was to be independently peer reviewed. Has this happened? I expect so, but as the monitoring and modelling remains shrouded in secrecy we have no means of determining whether the monitoring or modelling is adequate.

Why is this information not available for public scrutiny, when one of the Minister's conditions was that "baseline data and modelling results must be made publicly available on a monthly basis"?

The reason appears to be that Moremac does not want to release the information. Access to this information was complicated by the development being in the City of Greater Geelong (COGG), while the discharge impacts the Borough of Queenscliff (BoQ). Thus, while COGG gave planning permission for the development they would not share the information on the water quality modelling with BoQ. To obtain this information BoQ had to seek it via the Freedom of Information process from the Federal Department of Environment. In September BoQ was given access to the information, but the material provided is subject to copyright laws and advice provided by the Federal Department of Environment indicates that Council cannot make this information available publicly. BoQ is now investigating how the content of the material can be made publicly available without infringing applicable copyright laws.

Why is it important for water quality information to be available to the public? The FOI Act recognises that disclosure of information is important to enhance the transparency of policy making and administrative decision making, to ensure the community is well informed, and as the information itself is valuable and should be available to the public. When information is kept secret we have every reason to ask- Why? Copyright is usually intended to protect the "rights of creators of creative and artistic works",

and so is usually applied to prevent books from being copied illegally, rather than to prevent them from being read. As an environmental consultant, rather than a lawyer, it is very hard for me to see how a consultant's report can be covered by copyright laws.

If copyright can be applied to thwart the intention of FOI Act there are several worrying implications. First, what is to stop this law being applied to all similar FOI requests? Secondly, how does the BoQ council decide whether the modelling and monitoring of 'The Point' discharge is adequate? Clearly, BoQ need to seek advice on this matter from specialists, not employed by council. But, if they do so, presumably the advice of the specialist will also need to remain confidential. Finally, we would expect the EPA would oversee the monitoring being undertaken by Moremac, to ensure the discharge continues to comply with the predictions of the modelling. Consequently, they need access to this information and it would be even more alarming if they too were prevented from making this information public. By far the simplest solution to above problem would be for Moremac to make the information available, as my reading of the Minister's conditions suggest they have an obligation to do. Why wouldn't they want to do this?

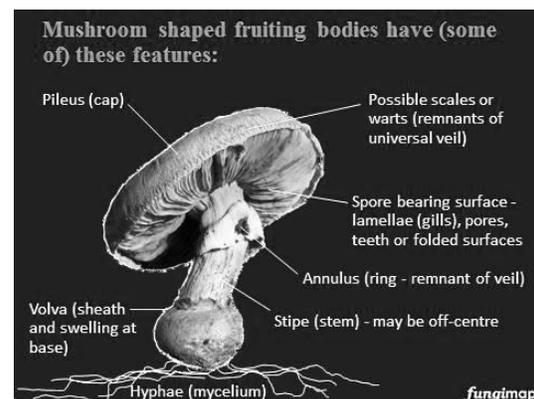
Fabulous Fungi (Bob Fuller)

On Friday 23rd September, SBEA hosted a public talk entitled "Fabulous Fungi" by Dr Ian Bell (see below). We were delighted that over 30 people attended on a night that competed with a Geelong footie final and another local meeting to question local council candidates.



Ian gave us a really comprehensive presentation covering the basics of fungi, how they live and their importance in ecosystems. We learnt that fungi are found everywhere, from rainforests to deserts, and that they are in fact not plants because they contain no chlorophyll. In Australia, there are approximately 15000 macrofungi but less than one third have been described. Amazingly the world's largest organism is in fact a fungus, its mycelium covering an area of 965 hectares underground in a forest in Oregon.

What we see above ground is the fruiting body of the fungus, designed to spread its spores. The spores of a fungus can be spread by air, water or animals.



Fungi feed on both dead and living material, as well as in symbiosis with a living host. Those that live on dead material can be described as 'nature's

recyclers'. The symbiotic or Mycorrhizal fungi trade with their hosts, exchanging resources such as sugars, water and nutrients. Fungi also provide food and habitat for insects and animals. For example, 90% of a potoroo's diet consists of truffles.

Fungi play a vital role in our ecology. Without them dead trees and leaf litter would not decay, carbon and nitrogen would not be recycled and the soil would not hold together. No trading in resources would leave 90% of Australian plants stunted or dead. Life as we know it would end. Importantly, some of the foods and drinks we enjoy would not be possible, such a beer, wine, cheese and yeast-based bread.

Ian's presentation contained much more fascinating information on a topic about which many of us know very little. The SBEA wishes to thank Ian for his great presentation.

Nursery Report (*Jill Warneke*)

On September 1st a group of Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens visited Arilpa, Point Lonsdale, and the Vicarage, Queenscliff. Jill accompanied them on their visit to Arilpa and we provided them with copies of our two plant booklets. On September 19th Liz McGrath, who manages the Arilpa property, took 19 of our volunteer propagators on a walk through Arilpa.

The Cemetery Moonah Walk (for which the Nursery supplied the plants) was shortlisted for the 2016 Premier's Sustainability Award in the Environmental Protection category and we are delighted to report that they were successful in the category of Environmental Protection. During the

morning teas at the working bees Jill has been giving the Nursery volunteers information and training for the forthcoming seed collection season.

Orange Bellied Parrot (OBP) (*Bob Fuller: source report by Craig Morley, Bellarine Peninsula OBP Regional Group Co-ordinator*)

Two of the three OBPs seen in Swan Bay in August were sighted in Melaleuca in SW Tasmania in September. Silver Red M and Blue Black F. were the two birds. Observers are waiting hopefully for the safe return of Silver Silver P, the third bird from Swan Bay. Blue Black F, the oldest bird in the wild OBP population, has now completed its 18th trip across Bass Strait. An amazing feat for the little creature.

Invasive Kelp in Swan Bay (*Guy Werner*)

In the winter of 2012, Parks Victoria staff noticed a new species of seaweed in the Queenscliff marina, growing thickly on the hull of a yacht that had been transferred there from Williamstown. The seaweed proved to be the Japanese kelp, *Undaria pinnatifida*, a native of the North Pacific Ocean and a recognised marine pest in our waters. Working then for Fisheries Victoria, I assembled a team of divers to survey and remove the few plants we found from the marina. Queenscliff Harbour and Parks Victoria staff have also periodically removed emerging plants.

The kelp first appeared in Australian waters in the 1980s on the Tasmanian east coast, probably brought in by shipping. Then in the 1990s, it was discovered on reefs in Port Phillip Bay and has now spread around the bay and also to the harbour at Apollo Bay. A

comparatively large seaweed, *Undaria* competes with native seaweeds and other organisms for living space and also shades smaller seaweeds and other algae from life-giving sunlight. *Undaria* can be identified by its flat, brown, lobed frond (up to 3 m in length but usually <1 m in Port Phillip Bay) with a single mid-rib attached to hard surfaces by a flexible, stem-like 'stipe' and branched, root-like 'holdfast'. When mature it develops specialised, spore-producing fronds ('sporophylls') on the stipe.

I wanted to know if and where *Undaria* had progressed since the initial introduction. There were reports of it growing at the boat ramp and also on Drapers Reef off the pilot jetty, but no-one knew if other parts of Swan Bay were being invaded. My plan was to snorkel at seven sites around Swan Bay to document any plants. My son, Max and Greg Parry, assisted by recording the locations of plants on a hand-held GPS unit. We also recorded the native common kelp (*Ecklonia radiata*) to look for evidence of competition. The sites ranged geographically from the Swan Bay Jetty on the western shoreline to various structures around the harbour area.

Sadly, I found the plant growing at nearly all sites. On a more positive note, it was absent from Swan Bay Jetty, perhaps indicating unsuitable habitat further into Swan Bay. Also there were very few plants on the cruising yacht club wharf (over the bridge on Sand Island. Strangely, most of the plants on the Swan Island Bridge were on the pylons on the eastern side). It was most abundant on a pontoon in the eastern half of the marina (near the initial introduction) and close to the Cut. There

were also plenty of plants on the metal sheet piling of the Trawler or Fishermen's Wharf (perhaps indicating a preference for this type of growing surface) and a few on the Bridge Street.

My impression was there were more plants where the currents are stronger. Whether this is due mainly to habitat suitability or higher concentrations of settling spores is open to debate. So what can be done? Hand removal is expensive and, due to a microscopic life-stage, usually ineffective. Personally I think the problem could be managed on artificial structures, such as pontoons, by removal of the pontoon, cleaning and replacement during months when there are few *Undaria* spores in the water. In the marina and other confined waters an option could be to reduce tidal currents by applying underwater baffles, such as closely-spaced timber slats, to the wharves along the Cut. These would reduce currents within the marina making it, I believe, a less suitable habitat for the kelp. Naturally, boat owners should be encouraged to keep their hulls clean, especially when sailing to uncontaminated ports.



A pair of young Japanese kelp plants at Queenscliff