Annual Report

For Annual General Meeting
Thursday 15th October 2015

During 2014-2015 the Werribee River Association continued an advocacy and role modelling approach to achieve its aims by working in the following areas:

1. VISION, PURPOSE, & POLICY

Envisioning a new WRivA
In June WRivA agreed to envision a professional WRivA in the future, with paid staff, and began discussions as to how we might achieve that.

Purpose
Our updated purpose has been in place now since November 2013:
“\textit{The purposes of the association are}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Encourage an appreciation of the Werribee River for the amenity and health of the whole community.
  \item Protect and enhance the diversity of unique flora and fauna in the Werribee river catchment.
  \item Maintain excellent quality water flows in the waterways of the Werribee river catchment to ensure a healthy eco-system."
\end{itemize}

Policy
No new formal policies were adopted during 2014-2015

Negative

As mentioned in last years’ Annual Report (President’s Report) WRivA has suffered because of the practice of a number of officer positions being left vacant by members in the last few years. This has created work for the President who has contributed a great deal to the efforts of WRivA. In the notice for the AGM Thursday 17th September, the President said, “We need people prepared to take part in ensuring our river has drinkable, fishable, swimmable water. Please ask how you can help.” The absence of good people willing to contribute to the purposes of the association is a concern.

Positive

WRivA continued its collaboration with LitterWatch, a coalition of a number of groups and organisations. This has helped build the numbers of people involved in attendance at some WRivA activities.
Negative into a Positive

The appalling environmental state of the river in the Werribee area, is a reflection of:

- the reduced rainfall regime the river has experienced for some decades
- the expansion of large urban communities in the area
- the manner in which its environs have suffered from mown grass practices and exotic tree introductions
- the manner in which the river has been regulated since 1908 over the whole distance of the river from headwaters to the sea

The Riverkeeper has taken advantage of the sickly symptoms; blue-green algae, Azolla sp. lack of fish, low flows and a modern deluge of litter to highlight the call for a healthier river.

2. SPEAKING UP FOR THE WERRIBEE

The association has been vocal during the past year in pursuit of its vision for a healthy, clean river, with ample flows protecting and enhancing diverse flora and fauna.

Points for Candidates

Tue Nov 4 2015
In the 2014 Victorian State election WRivA sent to candidates in the Werribee catchment, and political party leaders, a ‘Points for Candidates’ pamphlet, outlining the needs of the river. We had limited feedback with few acknowledgements. However it was a positive step which we should repeat in the future.

Why Does this GO ON?

Tue 25 Feb 2015
This news release was sent out by WRivA to all email recipients on our lists to highlight the huge load of litter washed into the Werribee River from the infamous Bulban Rd drain.

There was a work order issued by Melbourne Water to clean up some of the litter, and to investigate the upgrade of the drain infrastructure. The clean-up was completed in the area of the drain and for 100 metres downstream on the southern side of the river. There has been no further information forthcoming about work on the infrastructure.

The EPA replied to our release via their customer service team, and it took some further contact to have the information passed on the appropriate officer. Since then we have been able to supply the EPA with our report and data on litter.

Minister for the Environment

Mon 16 Feb 2015
Discussions on the need to improve environmental matters on the river were held with the Chief of Staff - Minister for Environment, Victoria.

New Brochure
Tue 10 Mar 2015
We published a new brochure describing the course of the river and some of its interesting places.
The brochure also outlined five threats to the river:

A. Better water quality. Major reports about the river and other catchment waterways show ongoing poor water quality.

B. More water. Environmental flows are beneficial, but the reality of climate change calls for more flows which will provide swimmable, fishable, drinkable water for the community.

C. Smarter litter legislation. Litter and plastic threaten platypus, fish, birds, amenity, and tourism. Voluntary clean ups cannot cope, costs are rising for all levels of government, harmful chemicals are entering the human food chain. Government, manufacturers, retailers and consumers must work together to lower this ever growing threat.

D. Planning and setback controls. These will ensure the community has ample physical and visual access to a natural river, vegetated waterways and wild spaces in the environment.

E. Protection. There will be 749,000 people living in 3 towns along the River in the River’s 3 municipalities by 2036. The river needs its values and qualities secured and proclaimed, to protect the river for the people for all time.

Newsletter

Published 2nd week, each 2nd month
Our newsletter continues to highlight the following needs of the river:
- An Urban Rivers Protection Act
- A change in the way the river is regulated as it is no longer appropriate to ignore the urban community’s needs
- A need to be releasing natural flows to the river
- A need to substitute excellent quality desalinated water for farming
- A need for restoration of a healthy level of biodiversity and the eradication of pest fish and animals
- An urgent need to introduce smart litter laws to free current and future generations of massive plastic pollution coming from manufacturing, retailing, development and consumption

3. STRATEGIC WATERWAY PROTECTION

Membership of Waterkeeper Alliance

Affiliating with Waterkeeper Alliance has given WRiVA a more strategic connection to an across the world call for drinkable, fishable, swimmable water in our river.

We were approached by a potential funder for a degree of financial support to set up WRiVA as a professional organisation under the name of the Riverkeeper in 2015. It is expected that further discussions will take place in the next few months.

Discussions with the three regional Waterkeepers have been fruitful and all have agreed to move further on seeking cooperative funding and support.

A Stream of Litter

The writing of a report on litter in the Werribee River entitled ‘A Stream of Litter’, was a strategic action which has highlighted:

- The very bad state of litter in the Werribee River from the Diversion Weir to Port Phillip Bay
- The sources and amount of litter in our community
- The huge load litter is placing on the environment, local government and volunteers
- The loss of amenity and pride to the community
- The lack of smart litter laws in Australia
The report has enabled WRivA to put forward a case for urgent work on the massive amount of litter in the river and in Port Phillip Bay, to local, state and Commonwealth governments.

**Habitat Improvements for the River**

During the past year WRivA has been actively involved with three planting initiatives:

1. A planting with Holcim Australia and Carranballac College on Cheetham Creek
2. A planting on the Pettit property Little River
3. A planting with WMCN and Parks Victoria at Werribee River Park

As an affiliated member of Western Melbourne Catchment Network we have supported Catchment Round Table discussions with Port Philip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority, which highlights and encourages plantings for habitat and land protection in the Werribee Catchment.

The Leadwest Biolink Action Plan is an excellent visionary document which has only been put into action in piecemeal ways. It outlines strong reasons why it should become a real action plan, and there are various initiatives which could put the plan into action.

**Health of the River**

WRivA has consistently called for a change in attitude to the river, by various management authorities, in order to give the community and the river itself a sense of place and value.

During 2015 we have highlighted a number of issues which all impinge on the health of the Werribee River:

- Reduced rainfall
- Over-regulation of the river
- In stream barriers
- Ongoing low flows
- Blue-green algae
- Azolla sp. coverage
- Lack of native fish
- Lack of WQ data
- Inefficient infrastructure
- Lack of community consultation
- Lack of care and promotion
- The need for a linear park status for the river

WRivA has undertaken a range of activity to tackle some of those issues, including water quality testing in Bungey’s Hole Werribee on a monthly basis during 2015, which have highlighted the degraded water quality in the lower Werribee.

In April 2015 WRivA created a graphic way in which to show the change in conditions in the river. In hindsight some of the trends as shown in the graph could in fact be worse.

The river has made a compelling case for a major review of its management

*Graph taken from our Newsletter No. 22 April 2015*
4. PRACTICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

CITY OF WYNDHAM

During 2014-2015 we worked successfully with the City on a number of practical initiatives, including LitterWatch and in other activities:

- Sharing our bird survey data
- Sharing our sightings
- Contributing to the Biodiversity Policy Steering Committee
- Contributing to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy & Policy Development Committee
- Promoting Council activities

At Wyndham City Environment & Sustainability Committee, Cr Peter Gibbons raised a motion which was passed to create a report on the Health and State of Werribee River.

City of Wyndham awarded WRiva a grant which enabled the LitterWatch program to go ahead. We thank them for this support.

WRiva looks forward to supporting City of Wyndham’s work into the future.

MELBOURNE WATER

Environmental Flows
WRiva has promoted and supported work by Melbourne Water on environmental flows for many years.
- WRiva submitted comments to the Werribee River Environmental Water Management Plan (EWMP)
- WRiva has submitted comments to the pricing plan for water

Platypus Surveys
These surveys provide data on platypus, which are a much loved flagship species by the general community.
- Carried out by Cesar Australia
- Very low capture rates in Werribee in recent years
- Two female & one male platypus netted in Werribee 2015 all previously not known to the survey
- Success in these surveys as measured by Facebook comments and likes is phenomenal, with over 3000+ viewing the recent October female capture and release

WRiva appreciates that these surveys are likely to be expensive but provide much interest and pride in the river by the local community.

WRiva looks forward to supporting Melbourne Water’s work into the future.

WMCN

WMCN is a most important local partner, providing links, networks and strategic support in natural resource management.

The Western Melbourne Catchments Network or WMCN is a non-profit organization and was established some years ago, on an initiative by WRiva and the Werribee Open Range Zoo. It has been successful in employing a facilitator and coordinator to look after the needs of a range of Landcare and friends of groups across the catchment. WRiva attends WMCN activities when appropriate and shares equipment, educational items and activities with WMCN from time to time.
WREC

The Western Region Environment Centre or WREC is a non-profit organization and manager of the Eco-Living Centre at 28 Ridge Dr Wyndhamvale. WRIVA has its archive material in that location, and meets there on a regular basis. We have participated in BBQ fund raisers for WREC at Bunning’s Hoppers Crossing and Werribee, work with them in LitterWatch and support the work of a number of initiatives and organizations affiliated with WREC.

WREC is a most important local partner, providing links, networks and support in wider environmental issues.

HOLCIM AUSTRALIA

Holcim Australia has been working with us on Cheetham Creek for three years
• Because Melbourne Water needs a community group who are incorporated and able to complete tasks required in that area
• Because areas like Cheetham Ck have become wetlands which support life which also shares the river
• Because we need to work strategically in new areas as there are opportunities for new memberships

We are grateful that Holcim Australia have contributed financially to our programs.

PM Planning

PM Planning have been sponsors of our newsletter during 2015.
We wish to thank them for their support.

5. EDUCATION

Community Talks

Werribee Garden Club Werribee River speaking engagement Mon 4 May 2015
Public meeting ‘A Stream of Litter’ Wed 9 Sep 2015
Church congregation Werribee River Sun 11 Oct 2015

Litterwatch

Wyndham LitterWatch was conducted for the third year by locals; WRiVA, WREC, WMCN and Crossroads Uniting Church, with support by Melbourne Water and Wyndham City Council.
This successful litter program featured:
• Local schools involvement
  o 9 schools in Wyndham with over 3000 students
  o cleaned up litter hot spots in Wyndham
  o asked politicians and businesses to act on litter measures
• Introducing Beach Patrol 3030
• Networking with western shorelines litter initiatives

The final report for LitterWatch is expected in November

School Activity

On Wed 5th Nov, about 70 Year 3 students from St Andrew’s School walked along a part of the river with the Werribee Riverkeeper, in order to develop their understanding of this beautiful natural asset.
6. AWARDS

Recognition Award From Environment Victoria

WRivA was very proud to receive a recognition award from Environment Victoria on Wed 29 Oct 2014. Members Heather Noble and Robyn Thomas attended the 2014 Community Environmental Recognition Awards night, and received the award from Amanda Nuttall, President of Environment Victoria.

Dame Phyllis Frost Award

Member John Forrester named the winner of the Dame Phyllis Frost Award for 2015 *Awarded by Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria and Sustainability Victoria*, the award is presented annually to individuals embodying the values of Dame Phyllis Frost, such as community participation and environmental protection.

7. ACTIVITIES

WRivA conducted a number of organized activities during the year. These activities provide much information, education and enjoyment for members and other participants. Images and stories from the activities provide many topics for our publications, and key messages.

Our activity included:
- Recognition award night Environment Victoria on Wed 29 Oct 2014
- Gold mining site inspection Sat 22 Nov 2015
- Fish Habitat Werribee Anglers Club Thur 4 Dec 2015
- Walk on the River for City for Wyndham Sat 6 Dec 2015
- Water Quality testing Bungeys Hole 1st Sat each month 2015
- Clean Up Australia Days – Business Tue 24 Feb and Public Sun 1 March
- PlatypusSpot survey Wed 4 March
- Platypus Surveys overnight Wed/Thur 4/5 March
- Manor Lakes School clean up Werribee Sth Beach Fri 1 May
- Dame Phyllis Frost Award night Fri 12 June 2015
- Werribee River Park Bird Survey Sat 20 Jun 2015
- Beach Patrol Launch Sunday 12 July 11am at Werribee South beach.
- National Tree Day - various
- Replas Recycling soft plastics Visit Tue 25 Aug 2015
- Inquiry into the EPA Workshop Mon 14 Sep 2015
- Waterwatch Invertebrate training with ANGFA Wed 16 Sep 2015
- Platypus Survey Tue/ Wed 13/14 Oct 2015

Members are welcome to attend these and encouraged to do so as they add to our networking capabilities and skills.
8. PARTICIPATION/OBSERVATION RATES

Participation Rates
Major activity days in conjunction with other organizations have yielded good numbers of participants and others who have interacted with, or have been exposed to our key messages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activity</th>
<th>Participants/Observers</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beach Patrol &amp; Other</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Up Australia Day</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Point Cook Carranballac College+ Coastal park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Program - Litterwatch</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>14 Wyndham Schools+ public meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting activities</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Werribee River Park, Cheetham Creek, Little River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird Survey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Werribee River, Werribee River Park, Backyards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Schools, church, meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. COMMUNICATIONS

Postal Mail

Very little postal mail is received in our PO Box 74 during the year, only about two-three items per month. However, even though it costs about $140 per year it may be strategic to maintain it in the immediate future.

Email

WRivA's email address is werribeeriver@gmail.com and statistics are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Commenced</th>
<th>Finished</th>
<th>Emails IN</th>
<th>Monthly Average</th>
<th>Emails OUT</th>
<th>Monthly Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>19th March 2011</td>
<td>18th Oct 2011</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>19th Oct 2011</td>
<td>17th Oct 2012</td>
<td>1424</td>
<td>118.66</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>61.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>18th Oct 2012</td>
<td>17th Oct 2013</td>
<td>2130</td>
<td>177.5</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>18th Oct 2013</td>
<td>15th Oct 2014</td>
<td>4041</td>
<td>336.75</td>
<td>1377</td>
<td>114.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facebook Page

The Werribee River Association Facebook page has been maintained since March 9 2011, and has featured a posting on average every few days. Our ‘Likes’ have doubled over the past year from 285 to 621. Highest postings were 6000+ for platypus video Dec 2014, 4500+ for platypus news Oct 2015

No unwanted postings have occurred in the last twelve months, and the page has been a success in terms of WRivA having instant internet presence.

Members are encouraged to submit material for posting or comment.
Twitter

Twitter activity began on 7th June 2014 as @werribeerivkeep with a tweet on the success of the June platypus survey from the Werribee Riverkeeper. We now have tweeted 444 times, mainly on litter, and sometimes on climate change, coal mining and other items from ABC news or similar. We are following 178 others, and have 137 followers.

Website

The current WRivA website has been in existence since March 2012. The address is www.werrribeeriver.org.au again claiming the Werribee River as part of WRivA’s branding. It is quite an informative site with a ‘whole of catchment’ focus, and a range of topics based on queries to WRivA over the years, and designed to appeal to school or individuals. It has recently undergone a facelift, and now has a blog. Its content matter is growing and all newsletters and recent reports are available there. Comment, suggestions and/or material from members are always appreciated.

Newsletter

The newsletters are sent as PDFs to members, friends, NRM organizations, government officers, and others. The newsletter was at first two pages and now out to six or seven pages going out to 355 contacts, including local press, government, organizations and businesses, as well as members and other persons in the Wyndham and wider communities. Comment, suggestions and/or material from members would be highly appreciated. The newsletter is available from our website and promoted on Facebook.

News Print Media

Short articles or mentions featuring WRivA or relevant business in the local press have been:

- Litter Bungey’s Hole Leader News Leader Community ePaper - Wyndham Leader - 3 Mar 2015
- Work on the river rewarded Wyndham Leader P9 Tue 30 Jun 2015
- Wyndham Star Weekly Wed 1 Jul 2015
- Interview on ABC Radio 774 Mon 6 Jul 9.15am

13. MEMBERSHIP

Overall WRIVA has around 33 financial members, with 33 adults and 7 children.

Committee meetings attendance averaged 3.5 and participation by members in other activity was generally low.

Increasing levels of participation rates would assist greater outcomes for the river and an increase in numbers of members is desirable.

Finally, thanks to those members who assisted with or enjoyed any of the above activities.

John Forrester
President
Thursday 15 Oct 2015