

# Friends of Skeleton Creek & Altona Bay Wetlands Inc.



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## October 2015 Newsletter

### EDITORIAL

#### After 50 days our Creek is 'Undammed'

On 14th October - 50 days after the unannounced damming of our Creek at 'The Islands' Waterhaven Estate, Point Cook, by the Hallmarc developer - the temporary soil and rock causeway was removed.

The purpose of the earth-filled causeway was to create a sewerage connection from the land development on the northern side of Skeleton Creek (next to the freeway) to the existing sewer point south of the Creek.

The developer could not bore under the Creek bed and bank area to install the sewage pipe, which would have mitigated the risk of stirring up sediment. So the sewage pipe (and two utility holes) was installed deep into the causeway, along with a 600 mm storm-water pipe.

Melbourne Water called Denice Perryman to advise of the "undamming".

*Continued next page*

### NEXT ACTIVITY:

#### MULCHING & WATERING DAY

**SUNDAY 25th OCT - 1 PM TO 3 PM**

**MERTON ST/MARKHAM WAY, ALTONA MEADOWS  
MELWAY MAP 208, E4**

Andrew Webster, Senior Conservation Ranger, HBCC, has managed to get us a lot of mulch for this site. We will need many hands to spread it to give our plants a bit of protection in the harsh summer weather to come. NAB volunteers and the Dera Sacha Sauda group have been invited to join us for the day.

Please bring rakes and wheel barrows if you can – otherwise, just bring yourself and build up a good appetite for afternoon tea!

Meet and register at the sign-in table end of Merton St, at the access gate to the Skeleton Creek shared path.

## Our Creek Looks a Muddy Mess!



*The removal of the causeway by earth-moving equipment has created a lot of mud. [Photo taken by John Dawes on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct.]*



*Downstream is an assortment of soil sediment and plant-based flotsam moving around in the water and up against the Creek's banks. [Photo taken by John Dawes on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct.]*



## Our Creek 'Undammed'

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When we inspected the site on the 14th October, the removal of the causeway by earth-moving equipment had created a lot of mud. The sediment trap that was claimed to be in on "day one" was still in place yet the water downstream, where the Creek widens, opposite Catalina Crt, was a distinctive browner colour, with an assortment of soil sediment and plant-based flotsam moving around in the water and up against the Creek's banks.

The Hallmarc developer nor any of the stakeholder authorities had informed the local community or our Friends group of the damming, and it took some weeks to find out what exactly was going on there.

Eventually, on 1st October, an onsite meeting was arranged with Wyndham City Council, Melbourne Water staff to discuss the situation.

At the meeting were Denise Perryman, Secretary FoSC, Angela Whiffin, President FoSC; Cameron Howie, Manager Regional Delivery (Waterways West), Melbourne Water; Ben English, Team Leader West Region, Melbourne Water; two 'hands-on' Service Delivery employees from Melbourne Water; and Peter Gibbs, Team Leader Natural Environment, Wyndham City Council.

City West Water were to control the sewerage connection but had "not been proactive", so Melbourne Water took over responsibility during this stage of the works. The two Melbourne Water Service Delivery employees were visiting the site every two or three days, and said the Hallmarc contractor was complying with all their requests for improvement.

### Native Vegetation Moved

Some native vegetation had to be moved to higher ground to protect it from being inundated by the rising upstream water caused by the damming and heavy rainfall in the area.

Earlier, on 7th Sep, Denise Perryman wrote to the developer Hallmarc to make our group's displeasure known and our concerns to the likely damage to the delicate local biodiversity along the Creek. And as our Creek flows into the internationally significant Cheetham Wetlands, protected by the Ramsar Convention, this was of particular concern.

Warren Keighran, Construction Manager, Hallmarc Construction replied almost straight away and said that the works had been approved and supervised by Melbourne Water and City of Wyndham, and that the works were "short-term".

Denise followed up with another letter on the 24th Sep, stressing the timely completion of the works, and "looking forward to the re-instatement of disturbed areas and fervently hoping that you will have sedimentation at the forefront of your mind as the works progresses."

Hallmarc did not reply to Denise's last letter.

FoSC have not seen any environmental impact report or any detail about the restoration work. Melbourne Water have only advised that the developer is now doing "remedial planting" in the affected parts of the Creek.

We have however been forewarned that there is another development stage requiring Creek damming upstream in

a couple of years. So the stakeholder authorities are going to work on how to make the future damming "a more robust process", to meet stringent environmental and regulatory obligations in line with community expectations.

### Damming Damned

On 25<sup>th</sup> Sep, a media release was sent to the local newspapers by John Dawes, Publicity Officer for FoSC. The Wyndham Star Weekly ran a story on 7th October with the headline 'Skeleton Creek Damming Damned', with a photo of Angela (previously photographed).

The Star Weekly reporter Adem Saban interviewed Angela over the phone (she says she was misquoted in parts). Overall, the article reflected what we wanted to get across – that the group was not happy at all with what the developer had done; as a matter of courtesy, local residents and our group should have been consulted and informed well before; and that we had to find out what was going on to our Creek in a roundabout way from the stakeholder authorities.



**Sunday  
27<sup>th</sup> Sep  
Working Bee  
Catalina Crt  
/Kerford  
Cres, Point  
Cook**



We had 13 people turn up to our activity; coincidentally, diagonally opposite the controversial Waterhaven Estate damming site. It was nice weather and Emma from Wyndham City Council came to replace Sal, who usually joins us, as he was at another activity.

We pulled out carpet weed, marshmallows and a range of other weeds. It was a good relaxed day and it was great to see locals turn up. Old hands Kaye, Wren, Peter, Bev, Tom, Greg, Angela and Denise were joined by 'newbies' Katrina Bourke and Bruce Boddington (who's happy to take photos for us if John Dawes is absent). Two passers-by came and talked to us, and we signed them up to receive our newsletters; hopefully, they may join us in future activities.

Angela noticed that the position of some of the plants affected their survival rate. Trees seemed to be beneficial to the plants in some cases - such as the she-oaks, which offered protection and cover from the prevailing winds. We shall keep this in mind for future plantings.

## 2016 Melbourne Water Grant for Growling Grass Frog Habitat



FoSC wish to apply for a Melbourne

Water grant to improve the habitat for the Growling Grass Frog. A suitable location selected is along Skeleton Creek at Bromage Close in Hoppers Crossing (just off Federation Trail).

To discuss the application, Angela and Denise met with Gerard Morel, River Health Officer from Melbourne Water, and from Wyndham City Council were Craig Dodson, Area Leader Conservation, Maddie Veale, Natural Environment Officer, and Darren Wright the new Community Engagement Officer Open Spaces.

There is an aquatic habitat for the frogs, but they like a range of places to hang out - so we want to plant there to give them some terrestrial habitat. We are looking at a site approx. 2 m x 70 m long.

Initially, we'd like to plant some tough, hardy native grass survivors like Lignum, Poa, Carex, Themeda and Atriplex.

Our hope is to get the Melbourne Water grant, as we did last year, and that Wyndham City Council will support our application.

[Postscript: after many hours working on the grant application, Denise has finally sent it off. So well done Denise, and we look forward to a successful outcome from your dedicated labours for Skeleton Creek ... and our local Growling Grass Frog!]

## Cunningham's Skink Poaching

Craig Dodson, Area Leader Conservation from Wyndham City Council has had reports (and seen photographs) of poaching of Cunningham's Skink from Skeleton Creek.



The skink seems to have disappeared from Kororoit Creek, but are still seen at Lollipop Creek and Skeleton Creek; although the Skeleton Creek habitat has become fragmented.

Apparently, large rocks have been moved to steal the Cunningham's Skink, with indications that a number of people have been involved in this illegal removal. Unfortunately, the responsible staff member from the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning has been on holidays, which has made policing difficult.

Craig had a meeting of interested parties on 16th Oct to come up with strategies and a plan of action. Our group was involved. A meeting of local residents is planned to be held on Saturday 24th October, so Craig can provide information and to ask for help. General signage may also be used. It is to be hoped we can get on top of the problem before it's too late.

*\* Cunningham's Skink is a sun-loving, large skink species native to southeastern Australia. It can reach up to 400 mm in length, and may be confused with blue-tongued lizards. The species is named in honour of Alan Cunningham, explorer and botanist.*



## Melbourne Water Photoshoot

Organised by Ranger Gerard Morel from Melbourne Water, some Friends were called up recently for a PR photoshoot, upstream Skeleton Creek, off Talliver Tce, Truganina.

From left to right were: Greg Orr, John Dawes, Gerard Morel, Kristine Konings, and Angela Whiffin.

*We didn't see any water flowing downstream, but apparently there's a trickle under the reeds. Probably it will be next to nothing with the predicted dry, hot summer coming!*

## Friends End of Year Event

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> Oct, some members of Friends of Skeleton Creek joined other local Friends group members for Hobsons Bay City Council's annual 'Friends End of Year Event' - this year at Merri Creek, East Brunswick.

We were taken on an informative guided walk in the Merri Creek wetland by Ray Radford, leading member of Friends of Merri Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee. This was followed by a catered-for picnic lunch and short tour of the nearby CERES Community Environment Park - many thanks to the Council's Conservation Rangers Andrew Webster and Suzette Rodoreda for hosting us to a wonderful day!

Further information on the Merri Creek Management Committee is at <http://www.mcmc.org.au/>

Their current exhibition 'Merri Creek: From Wasteland To Parkland' runs until 30th Oct at Brunswick Library, Dawson St, Brunswick. This exhibition documents the history of community action to transform Merri Creek. In November it will move to Coburg Library.

## FoSC Facebook Handover

Due to increased paid work and young family commitments, Peta Keown, who initially created our Facebook page, has handed over administration responsibilities of the site to John Dawes, Publications Officer, FoSC.

Thank you for your efforts, Peta!

## Adopting the Model Rules

At our last FoSC Meeting, Office Bearer's Duties were looked at so we can move our resolution to adopt the model rules from Consumer Affairs Victoria at the next AGM. We went through the duties and looked where possible conflicts with current practice could occur, and how we could overcome this.

Most conflicts needed only minor changes so we will be able to adopt the new rules at the AGM.

### Proposed FoSC Activity Calendar for 2016

Working with both local councils, Denice and Angela have drafted a proposed Friends of Skeleton Creek activity calendar for 2016 (to be confirmed):

- 28 Feb, Clarendon Crt, Seabrook
- 27 Mar, Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing
- 17 Apr, Clarendon Crt, Seabrook
- 22 May, Clarendon Crt, Seabrook
- May/June midweek planting, Clarendon Crt, Seabrook
- 26 Jun, Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing
- 24 Jul, National Tree Day
- 28 Aug, Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing
- 25 Sep, Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing
- 23 Oct, Merton St/Markham Way, Altona Meadows
- 27 Nov, Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing

### FoSC Annual General Meeting Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November

Our AGM will be held at the Old Laverton School, corner of Kiora St and Cameron Ave, Altona Meadows (Melway Map 53 E11), on Wed 4<sup>th</sup> Nov from 6:30 onwards.

Our guest speaker will be Bob Winters.

For many years Bob has been a leading sustainability educator. His career has included the senior education position at Healesville Sanctuary during the 70s and 80s.

While with the Gould League, Bob had many roles including program manager, publication manager, senior sustainability education officer and general manager.

Bob is well respected as a curriculum and children's author. He has developed materials about most aspects of sustainability for many audiences, and has a wide range of natural history and nature photography skills.

Best still for us, Bob lives in Sanctuary Lakes and has turned his photography and natural history skills to our Creek. We are looking forward to seeing our Creek reflected through Bob's eyes.

Please bring food to share for the evening. Food will need to be brought hot or to be suitable to eat cold as we have no heating up facilities at the venue. ❖

### FRIENDS OF SKELETON CREEK

#### 2015 CALENDAR

*\*\* Starting and finishing time of activities are 1 pm to 3 pm, unless otherwise advised.*

**Sun 25 October** - Mulch spreading and watering, Merton St/Markham Way, Altona Meadows

**Sun 29 November** - Weeding at Clarendon Crt, Seabrook

*Note: sometimes we may need to adjust our plans close to the time of each activity.*

The next FoSC meeting is the AGM on Wed 4 Nov, 6:30 pm, at the Old Laverton School, Altona Meadows (corner of Kiora St and Cameron Ave). Melway Map 53 E11.



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