

ENVIRO WEST



WESTERN REGION ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

Western Region Environment Centre

ANNUAL REPORT



Lollipop Creek in flood – 14/1/2011

September 2011

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Thanks to our Major Sponsors

Without the support of the community the Centre could not survive. We thank all our members and sponsors for their financial support over the past year. We hope you will continue to provide support in the forthcoming year.

In this Annual Report we once more pay tribute to our wonderful sponsors. We urge you to support them.



Board of Management

Office Bearers

Chairperson: Leigh Barrett
Secretary: Linda Scott
Treasurer: Catherine Ryan

Board Members

Cr. Marcel Mahfoud (Local Government - Wyndham)
Maree Sheehy (Community)
Jos & Helen van den Berg (Friends of Steele Creek)
Bro Sheffield-Brotherton (Community)
Beck Sheffield-Brotherton (Community)
Bronwyn Riddell (Shoestring Gardening)
Lindsay Swinden (Community)
Lolita Gunning (TTTDAG)
Graeme Hodgson (TTTDAG)
Paul Harder (Community)
Daniel Foster (Friends of Lollipop Creek)
Gail Price (Honorary member)

Working Group Coordinators

Finances: Leigh Barrett & Catherine Ryan
Membership: Bro & Beck Sheffield-Brotherton

Staff (Part time)

Director Harry van Moorst



TREAD LIGHTLY

Western Region Environment Centre Inc.
PO Box 464
Werribee Victoria, Australia, 3030
Ph: +61 3 9731 0288 or 9741 6306
Fax: +61 3 9974 8035
Email: wrec@envirowest.org.au
<http://www.envirowest.org.au>

CHAIR PERSON'S REPORT



A Candle in the Dark

The last year has been one of consolidation in many ways for the Western Region Environment Centre (WREC).

Many of the projects undertaken or supported by WREC continued to progress. This has been especially the case for the Shoestring Gardening Project. With the tireless efforts of Bronwyn Riddell and her team of volunteers, the number of participants, both young and old, who now are growing their own healthy organic produce has increased exponentially. This has proved that Shoestring Gardening continues to respond to a desire by many members of our community to provide for themselves and, at the same time, have fun, meet like-minded people, and learn new skills.

WREC continued to support the development of the Werribee Park Heritage Orchard and the Wyndham Vale Community Strengthening Project (including the Sustainable Christmas event), both of which, like Shoestring Gardening, not only promote environmental sustainability, but also facilitate community connectedness.

At the same time as promoting sustainability and community involvement, WREC has continued to raise awareness of the permanent damage being wreaked on our environment by those who place profit and self-interest over the wellbeing of our environment (and hence

the health of the community). Our Director, Harry van Moorst, has continued to provide advice and support to communities combating businesses and bureaucracies responsible for polluting the environment and allowing rampant, unsustainable urban development. Harry is truly the rudder that steers the WREC ship and the Board is ever-appreciative of his knowledge, drive and commitment.

From an organisational perspective the enthusiastic WREC Board has continued to address the fact that we run “on the smell of a rag dipped in renewable energy” with valuable support from Wyndham Council and eco-conscious businesses. I would like to thank every Board member for their demonstrated passion and dedication.

A special “thank you” goes to our Secretary, Linda, and Treasurer, Catherine, for the wonderful extra effort that is put in to running the organisation.

It is, however, with a sense of both frustration and despair that, as we look towards the latter part of 2011, Australia seems consumed by a debate over something for which debate has long passed. Should there be or should there not be a “carbon tax”? The debate should really be put in terms of should those who make money out of polluting our environment and damaging the planet forever pay for their actions? Should those same offenders be encouraged to develop sustainable practices? The answer is, of course, **absolutely and without question.**

When I hear the most important issues affecting the entire globe reduced to politicians’ headline slogans, I feel that WREC is like a single candle burning in the dark.

Leigh Barrett

Chairperson

Western Region Environment Centre

September 2011

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Earlier this year WEC conducted an 'eco tour' of the new Werribee Regional Park. The Pt. Cook Coastal Park Ranger, Bernie McCarrick, presented an excellent insight into the ecological and biodiversity values of the area and showed us the exciting progress for this new park along the lower reaches of the Werribee River. The park is a huge addition to the Werribee Park Mansion, and many visitors will be bike riding or participating in walking groups, bus tours, and school groups to enjoy this marvellous environmental asset.

It is planned that WREC tours will increase in the following years and some exciting tours are being planned to enable members and supporters to gain a better understanding of the wonderful environmental assets in the Western Region. Details will be publicised in forthcoming WREC Newsletters.

During 2011 Linda and Harry have been working with U3A (University of the Third Age) on mutual environmental education opportunities. This link has been mutually rewarding and will grow over the next year.

The WREC Sausage Sizzle Team has again been working on Bunnings Sausage Sizzles this year. This has been a vital fund-raiser. Thank you for your commitment, camaraderie, and hard work to become "Sausage Sizzlers Extraordinaires" of the Year!

WREC held several successful film nights to explore important environmental issues and to promote the Global Climate Change Message.

One of the highlights of the year was the wonderful performance by Rod Quantock in his very funny and extremely relevant show "Pardon My Carbon". It was rewarding night and should be seen by everyone (another performance has been organised by the Greens later this year).

Sustainability Week was again one of the highlights of the latter half of 2011. WREC initiated the Sustainability Expo back in 2002 and held a series of them in subsequent years. This became a partnership with Council several years ago and has since grown to its



current form. This year we again had Vasili as a major attraction and were able to publicly announce that Vasili is now the patron of Shoestring Gardening. The community sector was again very well represented and will continue to be a major exhibitor in future years.

Thanks again to Leigh, Lindsay and the team for another wonderful Trivia Night at the Hoppers Crossing Club. There were 26 committed sponsors who contributed excellent prizes for the night and we thank them all. A special thanks to the Hoppers Crossing Club for its ongoing support. Everyone had a lot of fun and congratulations to the winning team. The funds raised provide an important boost to WREC's ability to protect our environment.

Thanks again to Wyndham City Council, our members and financial contributors and our hard working and committed volunteers. Thanks also to the growing list of community groups and businesses that are aware of the risks of climate change and are supporting WREC's efforts.

If you can help in any way please phone us or email wrec@envirowest.org.au.

YOU ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Linda Scott
WREC Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT

This is my first report as WREC's Treasurer, after putting up my hand at last year's AGM.

The outgoing treasurer was able to hand over a full set of up to date accounts which has been very helpful in enabling me to "come up to speed" with WREC's operation and financial position.

WREC ended the financial year with what looks like a large surplus, however although our financial position is solid, the large surplus represents the receipt of grant funds late in the year which are allocated to specific projects and not expended at 30th June.

WREC's main income source continues to be via various grants from governments of all levels for which we make written applications. The largest grant comes from Wyndham City Council which allows our Director to receive a part time wage. An application for Tax Deductible Donation status is currently being processed by the Australian Tax Office, ATO, and following receipt of this we will be able to provide receipts for donations over \$2 that are tax deductible. We are hoping this will make donations to WREC a more attractive option for our benefactors (and lead to increased donations!).

Unfortunately even for committed Environmental campaigners, used to operating on a "shoestring", we required more funding than we were able to obtain from grants. We have supplemented our income this year with a number of fundraisers in the form of sausage sizzles at Bunnings and a trivia night. Although some members have ideological issues with sausage sizzles in particular (meat sausages are the only ones allowed to be sold at Bunnings), they have been found to be a very lucrative operation at Bunnings and well worth the effort. These funds are currently funding a number of environmental projects and to pay off a debt that we have with the ATO.

In summary, WREC met all its financial obligations during the 2011 financial year and expects to be able to continue to do so.



The WREC accounts for the financial year 2010-2011 are attached on the last 2 pages.

Catherine Ryan

Treasurer
Western Region Environment Centre
September 2011



Rod Quantock deciding that we really do live in "The Age of Stupid"

DIRECTOR'S REPORT



2010-11 has been another successful year full of environmental activities as well as the commencement of a substantial consolidation of WREC's organisational processes.

The Wyndham EcoLiving Centre (WREC's premises) continue to provide a valued venue for a range of environment group and many meetings by environment and community groups.

Our regular activities, such as assisting other groups, providing information and advice and assisting with organisation of activities and campaigns has continued at a growing pace.

A number of plans made last year for the establishment of an home sustainability retrofitting program failed to receive funding support and were not able to be implemented. New funding applications are currently before both Wyndham Council and the Federal Government.

Meanwhile we have managed to gain some funding from Council to commence the retrofitting of the EcoLiving Centre, enabling us to install solar hot water, a 1.5 Kw solar electric system and (in a few weeks) a 10,000 litre water tank. Plans are underway to improve the efficiency of the lighting in several of the rooms and other sustainability improvements.

The work with Shoestring Gardening and the Werribee Park Heritage Orchard has continued and has required substantial time and energy.

In particular the Shoestring Gardening project, after suffering the loss of its part-time coordinator left a vacuum that has taken some time to fill.

Despite this Shoestring Gardening has grown substantially. The bulk buying of hay bales and manure for the no-dig garden beds has continued and plans for the 'mass production' of garden bed frameworks is currently under way.

Climate change has continued to be a substantial concern this year amidst a wide range of denial propaganda in the mass media. The manic attacks on the carbon tax as a likely cause of economic collapse has been a wonderful way to draw attention away from the infinitely greater costs of failing to curb climate change. This is particularly ironic in view of the growing recognition that the increasing instability of the global financial system is not caused by little things like a small carbon tax but by the very real glutinous lifestyles based on increasing household and corporate debt in the 'developed world'.

In short, the cause of global financial woes are the continuing determination to live beyond our means and in the process create a massive ecological footprint which would require three planets or more if the average Australian footprint became a global one. And it is this **ecological deficit** that underpins the growing financial woes facing the world.

WREC has developed strong links with Council's Wyndham Vale Community Strengthening project and has benefited from the great work done by Council's community development worker, Gail Price. Thanks for all your help and your networking skills which have benefited not only WREC but many other groups in Wyndham Vale.

As a result of Gail's initiatives WREC has also established strong links with Iramoo Community Centre and we have made

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

space available downstairs to share with the Arts Studio project based at Iramoo.

Once again none of this year's successes could have happened without the many people who have contributed so generously to WREC's efforts over the past year. I again thank all the people who have helped WREC make this a productive year. Special thanks must go to all our committed Board members and our very capable Chairperson, Secretary and new Treasurer.

Harry van Moorst
Director



Cottrell Street in flood 14/1/2011

Some More of the Activities in 2010-2011

Sustainable Christmas Festival

The Sustainable Christmas Festival was held for the second year in a row and again provided a fun and informative community event in Wyndham Vale alongside Lollipop Creek and the "castle" shops.

The craft section proved very popular and many children and parents came to make their own presents for Christmas. As well there were Oxfam presents, such as chooks and goats for poor villages in Africa and other under-developed countries which people bought as an alternative type of present.

The face painting, jumping castle, Shoestring Garden and the choir were all popular and a good time was had by all.

The Christmas fair will be held again this year in early December.



Wyndham Sustainability Festival - 2011

WREC partnered with Wyndham Council to organise the Wyndham Sustainability Festival for 2011.

During the week WREC screened the film Gaslands which showed the dangers of coal seam gas (CSG) extraction through high pressure rock fracturing (called “fracking”). The film was considered particularly appropriate because a mining company in Bachus Marsh had recently indicated its intentions to mine CSG in the area and similar plans are already way in Queensland and NSW.

WREC also provided assistance to the Hoppers Crossing Secondary College year 10 Ecological Footprint course run by Ms Dragitza Valickovic as part of Sustainability Week this year. Hopefully more such school programs will be run next year.



Hoppers Crossing student drawing a 'life cycle' diagram of the baking of a cake

On Saturday 10th September there was a small 'market' held in the Piazza opposite the Cultural Centre in Watton Street. WREC worked with Shoestring Gardening to have a display and seed planting stall for children and parents to come and plant seeds for their own vegetable garden. This was a popular event and



Seedlings grown in egg cartons prepared by kids



The Saturday market in the Watton Street Piazza the first major activity in the (still to be completed) piazza.

The Sustainability Expo was held for only one day this year: Sunday 11th September at the Civic Centre.

Council's Free Native Tree giveaway was joined by Shoestring Gardening's free vegetable seedlings giveaway and both proved a major drawcard.

WREC joined with the Western Melbourne Catchments Network (WMCN) to organise a large sustainability display also involving the Werribee River Association, Australian Plant Society, several Friends groups.



The WREC and Shoestring display

WREC gained a number of new members and several new enthusiastic volunteers.

The Expo had the usual displays of solar energy panels, non-polluting detergents, waste management and gardening supplies and other sustainable merchandise alongside educational organisations such as Victoria University's water research activities.

Once again celebrity gardener Vasili was the attraction in the afternoon. At the end of his popular show we were able to organise a major announcement: Vasili had agreed to become the official patron of Shoestring Gardening (to much applause when announced by deputy mayor, Bob Fairclough).



John Forrester from the Werribee River Association showing the newly preserved Eagle



Karen Bembridge and family received 3rd prize in the Sustainable Garden competition – no mean feat when it was the only food garden as distinct from landscape and flower gardens



Vasiliy accepting the request to become Shoestring Gardening's official Patron – announced by Deputy Mayor, Cr. Bob Fairclough

Trivia Night 2011 – Bastille Day (+1)

The 2011 WREC Trivia Night was held on Friday, 15th July –the day after Bastille Day.

Our Master of Trivia, Leigh Barrett, with assistance from several WREC members, organised a French theme with decorations to match (except for the guillotine – although some of the guests were rather off their heads).



Our Hosts for the night:



Napoleon Barrett



“Mon Dieu! He’s lost his head!”



Lindsay Sans-culottes

We Are The Champions!



Colleen Hartland (MLC) drawing a winning ticket for one of the many prizes.



The winning team (“Le Maquis”) collecting some of their prizes

Shoestring Gardening - 2011

The Shoestring Gardening Project has continued to be one of the most popular and fast growing programs in Wyndham. Despite a set-back of several months between December and May due staff problems activities have continued and picked up over the past few months and the project is expanding rapidly.

The photos below indicate some of the many activities undertaken by the group with great assistance from Karen Bembridge and Bronwyn Riddell and support from WREC.

Within the next month Shoestring Gardening will be incorporated and will be able to run as an independent organisation with its own management committee and structure.



Above: Children sowing seeds in egg cartons at the Woodville Fun Day, August 2011

Below: Marlena helping to advise on plants at Woodville Fun Day.



Shoestring Multicultural Food project

An exciting project initiated by Shoestring is the Multicultural Food project. This was initiated by 3 students on placement last year and has now grown into a partnership with the Karen (Burmese) community. Meetings and workshops have commenced to assist the Karen community to grow the vegetables they are accustomed to in their homeland and several gardens are in the process of being established, including an 'experimental' garden at the back of the EcoLiving Centre.



Above top to bottom: meetings with Karen community members to identify customary vegetables. **Below:** No-dig gardening workshop led by Karen Burbridge and attended by Karen community members



Food gardening that doesn't cost the Earth!

Shoestring Gardening (contd)



Working With Schools

This year Shoestring Gardening has worked with two schools as well as having discussions with several other schools for next year's activities.

As part of a student placement program involving more than 20 year 9 students from Manor Lakes College at WREC several students assisted in finishing the Children's Food Garden at Iramoo Community Centre.

Another project involved Year 10 students at Hoppers Crossing Secondary College where students learnt how to establish a vegetable garden in the school grounds as part of their Ecological Footprint curriculum.



Above: Year 9 students from Manor Lakes College after finishing the Children's garden at Iramoo.

Below: Year 10 students at Hoppers Crossing S.C. showing their seed propagation efforts prior to establishing their food garden.



Like to join or find out more?

Contact Shoestring Gardening: call Karen Bembridge or Bronwyn Riddell on 9731 0288 or 0431 121218

Meetings and Workshops at:

Wyndham EcoLiving Centre, 28 Ridge Drive, Wyndham Vale.

Heathdale & Neighbourhood Community Shed, 57a Kookaburra Ave., Werribee.

Growth, Loss of Green Wedges and Threats to Habitat

The continuing growth of our outer suburbs and the urban sprawl is creating even greater problems in areas such as Wyndham, Melton and Hume.

Current plans to add a further 3,300+ households in the already grid-locked Point Cook is tantamount to planning madness. Similar “logical inclusions” combine to create considerable further loss of endangered habitats, especially the critically endangered Werribee Plains grasslands and woody grasslands.

Similar desires by developers to make a profit regardless of the environmental and social impacts can be seen in the attempt to build a medium density estate directly opposite Serendip Sanctuary despite zoning restrictions.



Young people opposing the residential threat to Serendip Sanctuary- and the protests eventually succeeded.

WREC continues to oppose such “illogical inclusions” and have worked with the Catchments Network (WMCN) and others to prepare submissions opposing further loss of our green wedges and endangered habitats.

The new Werribee River Park and WREC members on the new bridge linking it to the Werribee Park Mansion and Heritage Orchard.



These agricultural landscapes will soon be turned into rooftops as part of the Melbourne 5Million policies promoted by both recent governments

But we welcome the new Werribee River Park

Some WREC members recently visited the new Werribee River Park as one of our “ecotours” organised by our secretary, Linda Scott.

The park is very impressive and will be a major environmental and recreational asset. It has the additional advantage of being directly linked across the river to the Werribee Mansion and the Werribee Park Heritage Orchard, making visits to the park even more exciting.



The Sustainability Makeover of the EcoLiving Centre

WREC received grants from Wyndham City Council and City West Water to enable us to commence the retrofitting of the Centre to make it more ecologically sustainable.

The grants enabled us to install a solar hot water system and a 1.5Kw PV electricity system. In addition we were able to purchase a 10,000 Litre water tank for gardening, seed propagation and related activities as well as commence the landscaping of the front garden.



The photo-voltaic (PV) system

Council also did some serious maintenance on the guttering. Unfortunately, while repairing the eaves it was discovered that some of the older eave lining contained asbestos. This led to a delay in completion and the shut-down of the Centre for several days while the asbestos was safely removed and the eaves repaired.



WREC members started the process of clearing the back garden in preparation for the development of an 'experimental' food garden for multicultural vegetables not so readily found in Victoria.

The working bee managed to clear out the worst of the weeds and put some order into the back yard (but still considerably more work needs to be done during October and November).



The solar hot water tank with protective cage



In the middle of the working bee we managed to celebrate Bro's birthday

Werribee Park Heritage Orchard Open Day

The Werribee Park Heritage Orchard (WPHO) Open Day provided a wonderful opportunity to see the progress being made in revitalising and expanding the orchard. Water tanks, fencing and pruning are just some of the advances made in a very short time (thanks to the hard work of a committed committee and the support of Parks Victoria and staff).

The WPHO is an increasingly recognised heritage asset in Wyndham and WREC is proud to have been actively involved in its inception and development.



Coal Mines in Bacchus Marsh

The Maddingley Brown Coal Mine (MBC) is the currently operating coal mine in Bacchus Marsh. It has become the subject of growing controversy over its dumping of contaminated soil (a prescribed hazardous waste) into the mine cavity. Perhaps even more controversial is its construction of a compulsory 'firewall' (to protect the coal seam from fire) out of contaminated soil evidently containing a range of combustible chemicals (with EPA approval!).



Now a second mine is being proposed in the same region to establish a Coal Seam Gas (CSG) mining project. The company (Mantle Mining) has commenced exploratory drilling and incurred the wrath of many locals. WREC has expressed support for their opposition to CSG and the fracking methods used to fracture the rock and extract the gas. It is a major environmental threat and will only increase global warming emissions.



Clean Up Australia Day



WREC assisted Wyndham Council in the Clean Up Day at Presidents Park. A large amount of rubbish was collected along the river (a large truck full). The involvement of a large number of Karen migrants helped make it a very successful day.



The flooding of Lollipop Creek earlier this year showed how flood prone the area is – and it now appears to be the site of another major housing estate – will Council grant the building permits again, as it did several decades ago along Ridge Drive?

And just a few more photos:



Is this Rod Quantock watching himself perform in order to write a review?

FINANCIAL STATEMENT: 2010-2011

Western Region Environment Centre Inc.

29 Ridge Dr, Wyndham Vale 3024

Profit & Loss Report

	FY 10/11	FY 09/10
Income		
Grants - General	\$47,320	\$26,000
Grant - Shoestring Garden	\$7,000	\$0
Interest received	\$66	\$17
Membership	\$1,280	\$300
Fundraising - Sausage Sizzles	\$8,232	\$8,838
Fundraising - Other	\$5,995	\$0
Reimbursements	\$6,370	\$0
Donations	\$95	\$1,191
Total Income	\$76,358	\$36,346
General/Activity Expenses		
Accounting Fees	\$356	
Environment Services	\$0	\$4,364
Advertising	\$43	\$0
Shoestring Garden	\$4,687	\$100
Fundraising activity	\$492	\$1,577
Signage & Banners	\$0	\$88
Venue Hire	\$0	\$73
Dues & Subscriptions	\$297	
Insurance	\$251	\$362
Leasehold Improvement Expense	\$142	
Legal Fees	\$24	\$65
Operating Expenses		
Amenities	\$0	\$480
Bank Charges	\$40	\$45
Internet & phone	\$2,782	\$2,753
Maintenance & repairs	\$1,086	\$631
Office Supplies	\$2,084	\$112
Postage/Courier	\$0	\$120
Printing/copying	\$0	\$586
Utilities	\$604	\$596
Website	\$212	

Telephone, other	\$151	
Water	\$25	
Employment Expenses		
Wages & Salaries - Director	\$25,000	\$24,563
Superannuation	\$2,250	\$2,211
Workcover	\$147	\$148
Total General/Activity Expenses	\$40,674	\$38,874
Net Surplus/Deficit	\$35,674*	-\$2,528

* The “surplus” is comprised of approximately \$21,000 of unspent, but committed, grant money and taxes still to be paid. Much of this has been spent since the end of the reporting year, including the money for the retrofitting of the EcoLiving Centre and additional expenses from the Shoestrung grant since the start of July.

