

Annual Reports from AGM 12.1.2013

President's Report:

With the slow-down in the local and national economy, it has been a much more subdued 12 months in terms of new development proposals on the Island, but there are many homes being built now on approved sub-divisions on the Ventnor/Cowes edge.

PICS this year has been involved in the consultation stage of the Strategic and Environment Plans for the Phillip Island Nature Parks. It has submitted comments to the Bass Coast Shire's Rural Land Strategy Discussion Paper. PICS believes in maintaining the integrity of the rural land in the shire and that farming communities need to be supported and encouraged as good land managers. PICS had involvement with the Community Groups Day at Churchill Island, earlier in the year, and more recently, an excellent display at the World Environment Expo at San Remo for school-children. Reports will follow this one, from various environment groups and activities. I want to particularly mention tonight, the wonderful work John Eddy does with the Red Rocks Coastcare. The results are just wonderful.

PICS was pleased to welcome 2 new members to the committee, following last year's AGM, Steve and Danni Angel. Danni was elected Treasurer, taking over from a busy Christine. Steve has organised during the year, after consultation with the committee, the making of 2 handsome feather banners which you can see here tonight. Steve also set up a Facebook page for PICS, which Christine maintains as does Simon Eddy with the web-site. The committee is very grateful for all this.

Over the last few years, PICS reps. and other group reps. have met regularly with BCS Planning Officers. Last year these meetings became every 2 month, then 3, and PICS is concerned that these meetings may not continue this year. The conversations are important for all parties to be kept informed.

In May, PICS held a Forum in the Parish Hall, titled: How Can We Achieve Growth and Sustainability on the Island? The invited speakers were from BCS, PINP, PI Farmers, PICS, PI Business and Tourism and South Coast Community Group. It was great as 70 people came along, asked questions and stayed for a while, chatting over a cuppa. The committee feels this type of an event is valuable and plan to have another Forum, this time in April titled: A Sustainable Architecture Conversation. It is so important that new home-builders consider neighbourhood character, sustainable designs and the use of environmentally friendly materials.

In November, PICS hosted a Meet the Candidates Forum, again in the Parish Hall which was well attended by Council candidates and community members.

In May, the Shadow Minister of Planning, Brian Tee, requested a submission from PICS to support an Application to VCAT seeking the release of documents, relating to the gazetted Cadogan Ventnor land re-zoning. The Application was successful and the documents became available, however the status of the land is still uncertain.

My thanks to all committee members and especially to Christine Grayden, who not only is the Society's secretary but also applies for Grants, which are usually successful, and is, along with John Eddy, the Editor of the Newsletter. PICS wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Gaye Cleeland as the Minute Secretary, as she steps down tonight.

Many organisations, including the Conservation Society, are concerned by the State Government's funding cutbacks to many valued environment personnel and programs in Victoria. Whenever Phillip Island's flora and fauna are threatened by insensitive policies or developments, the Phillip Island Conservation Society will always lobby for a liveable Island where the natural environment is respected and valued.

Anne Davie

PLANNING:

As planning issues go, 2012 was a relatively quiet year. Moving from east to west across Phillip Island, PICS major concerns have been:

1. The Boys Home at Newhaven, which now has a permit for Residential Subdivision. At the VCAT Hearing, PICS asked for, and was given, an area of Public Open Space at the north west corner. (Now, in February 2013 the Boys Home is advertised for sale).

2. Woolamai House

PICS has been involved with plans for the Woolamai House land for about twenty years! From issues with the high concrete fence built 8" inside the boundary so that it was strictly legal, to a motel complete with wildlife park and nine hole golf course, to what finally has been decided – a Residential Subdivision! The final VCAT Hearing was fascinating. The dominant player was the CFA – and Penny Manning and I learnt a great deal about the enforcement powers of the CFA! We also learnt about the very strong restrictions on building near a wildlife area – in this instance the Newhaven Swamp. If all the proposed foreshore protection works are carried out, the foreshore hopefully will be able to withstand the greatly increased people pressure.

The Fire Access track is to be cleared of all weeds, including the pine trees, and when all that clearance has been done, there won't be much left. But there should be an opportunity to plant very low growing indigenous plants.

3. Proposed Residential Subdivision parallel to the main road, and behind the garden supplies at Newhaven. As yet PICS has had no opportunity to comment – but WE WILL! This is a very sensitive area close to the Churchill Island Marine National Park and ultra caution is required!

4. The "Lechte Land" and the Back Nine of the Cowes Golf Club and possible associated housing. This issue has been simmering along throughout 2012, but nothing has yet surfaced for public comment – so we watch and wait.

5. Saltwater Creek – a great joy! The walking track is being marked out, the location of the bridge settled, and, 25 years on, plans are really moving!

6. Summerland Peninsula – another joy! The weeds have ALMOST gone, the revegetation works are marvelous and we are looking forward to taking part in the planning process for controlled public and vehicular access.

7. National Trust Classified Landscapes: PICS is working with the National Trust on the upgrading of the Classified Landscapes here.

8. ANTICIPATED PLANNING ISSUES IN 2013:

a. The commercial development of the Hollydene site, and its revegetation.

b. The Isle of Wight hotel site development

c. The redevelopment and revegetation of ALL the Public Land on the eastern and northern sides of the Cultural and Heritage Centres.

d. The redevelopment and revegetation of Olive Justice Place.

e. The vehicular ferry?

f. The Port of Hastings?

g. The re-location of sporting facilities from Church St to CA 83?

Whatever happens in 2013, we won't be bored!

Margaret Hancock.

BARB MARTIN BUSHBANK REPORT

The Bushbank continues to propagate thousands of plants each year, for farm tree-lines and the urban community. Big orders were down again for the 2nd year running, as many farmers have now carried out their planting requirements. However, it appears there will be more substantial orders in 2013, required by new property owners.

The volunteer contribution to the maintenance of the nursery and plant propagation remains quite amazing with an average of 55 hours a week throughout the year. The Committee is very appreciative of the considerable contribution by members of Friends of The Koalas and financial support. Volunteers have also been checking the nursery while Jenny had a holiday season break and ran the nursery for the 2 months Jenny was away in winter. PINP's was able to assist the Bushbank program by arranging for some enthusiastic university students to spend some hours on site. The Bushbank is very fortunate in having such a caring, competent Co-ordinator in Jenny, who continues to travel to Cowes from the Peninsula by ferry!

During the 12 months the committee spoke to a number of Agencies seeking some financial support to assist with Jenny's salary, as funds are being stretched with the decline in sales. It is hoped there will be some good news about the committee's efforts in the near future. A Web-site is being developed.

Jan Fleming, who assists greatly with the Saturday Open Day sales, and Jenny provided a Display at the Opening of The Town Square in November. A lot of interest was created. Jenny organised a Bushbank Display at the World Environment Day at San Remo. There was tree-planting that day at the Koala Centre by school-children and assisted by Jenny, Ashley Reed and volunteers. The Bushbank volunteers enjoyed the company and contribution from the students of the Bass Coast Special School in Term 1.

It is hoped that the Barb Martin Bushbank will be a feature in the next edition of Coastell, the Bass Coast Council publication. We would all agree, it is truly a good news story!

Anne Davie, PICS rep.

FRIENDS OF KOALAS

Koalas on Phillip Island continue to do well in the Koala Conservation Centre but those outside struggle and their situation is unlikely to improve. Their major problem is declining habitat which is a trend unlikely to be reversed as long as 'suburban style' development continues. Many new homes on the island have little space for gardens and those that have mostly shy away from gardens that provide habitat.

FOK continues to try to improve the situation with regular habitat days, a quarterly newsletter to inform and educate people, and lobbying on issues that affect wildlife. Monthly Habitat Days in 2012 began with our annual ragwort pull in Oswin Roberts Reserve. Three habitat days were spent working at the Barb Martin Bush Bank and three more working on revegetation coops at Conservation Hill. A further morning was spent removing *Pittosporum* in Oswin Roberts Reserve, while another was spent planting manna gums near the chicory kiln in Harbison Road. The remaining days were taken up with Clean Up Australia Day, the Easter Fun Festival at Churchill Island (where we had a stall and display) and our very special Silver Spade Day at the KCC.

Regular monthly koala counts continue at the KCC. The mornings commenced in 1992 and are a great way to enjoy the centre while providing information for PINP staff. We also attended PINP Community Open Day and had a display at the Bass Coast Shire's Schools' Environment Expo at San Remo in November.

During 2012 FOK has commented on the Environment Effects Statement process in Victoria, a deposit scheme for drink bottles, coal seam gas exploration, roadside vegetation, the Federal Government's decision on the status of koalas, bushfire management, planted vegetation management, and vegetation clearing regulations. Submissions were made on the PINP's Environment Management Plan, Domestic Animal Management Plan, the Gippsland Integrated Land Use Plan, and the Rural Land Use Strategy. FOK continues to enjoy its involvement with the KCC and Bush Bank – two facilities which provide hope and inspiration for the future. I would like to thank the PINP staff for their ongoing support.

Patsy Hunt, FOK President.

FOCIS

Friends of Churchill Island Society, or FOCIS, had a busy year. We had three working bees – one for the farm machinery and two for inside the house and cottages, store room, scullery and wash house. Four general meetings were held at which a report was given by Matt Jackson, CEO of Phillip Island Nature Parks, to keep us up to date with what is happening in the other parks as well as Churchill Island. FOCIS participated in the Open Day with Christine Grayden, the curator, giving two "Show and Tell" sessions in the Dining Room of Amess House. Christine's role is paid for by a grant to FOCIS which is passed on to her. A second annual grant was made available in early July for her to continue her work leading up to our bid for re-accreditation by Museums Australia Victoria in June this year.

We had speakers at our meetings, including Arnis Heislars, who spent a two week holiday on Churchill Island with his family in 1976, just after the government had purchased the island,

and before any restoration work was done there. The place was very run down, as shown in his photos of the time, with erosion, rabbits everywhere, and the buildings very neglected. Rebecca Sanders, Ph D candidate, spoke to us about her thesis which is on the unusual settlement patterns of Churchill Island compared with the rest of Victoria. Christine talked about the Janet Amess Lace Collection and showed about twenty examples from the 98 piece collection. Cherry McFee spoke on "My childhood on Phillip Island", including visits to Churchill Island.

FOCIS participated in the Easter Family Festival by having a calico puppet decorating stall, similar to the ones PICS has run for children at the Sustainability Festivals. It was very popular. FOCIS has also underwritten the reprinting of Pat Baird's book: Churchill Island: History and Her Story. The committee, including representatives from FOK, PICS and Phillip Island & District Historical Society, has worked well together throughout the year.

Pauline Taylor/Christine Grayden.

RED ROCKS COASTCARE

For Red Rocks Coastcare, 2012 was a year of many achievements and successes. Most notable among these was the securing of two grants totaling over \$20,000 to assist us with protecting and enhancing the Moonah Woodland that is the main natural asset in this coastal reserve. Firstly, a Communities for Nature grant of \$13,000 (plus GST) allowed the construction of a stairway to the beach at the end of the Appley Ave track. This was completed in early November, and entailed additional funding from the Bass Coast Shire Council, who arranged and supervised the contractor. The stairway will substantially reduce erosion around moonahs and other dune vegetation at this beach access.

The second grant, from Coastcare Victoria Community Grants, provided just over \$6000 for the control of noxious, invasive weeds, in particular targeting Blue Periwinkle, but including Blackberry and Bridal Creeper. This allowed funding of the first stage of a 3 year program, involving 2 spraying cycles by contractor Envirogain. These herbicide applications were carried out in October and late December. So far, results appear to be excellent for control of Blackberry and bridal Creeper, and looking promising for the very hard-to-kill Blue periwinkle. The spraying program for this weed which covers large patches of the Moonah woodland, will continue into 2013, and another Communities for Nature grant has been applied for to assist funding for that.

As a condition of obtaining the 2012 grants, we embarked on a campaign to inform the local community about our projects, with 300 leaflets printed and letter-boxed in the area by our volunteers, frequent articles in the local press, and a Public meeting and Site Inspection at Red Rocks in early October. That gathering was also able to celebrate the installation, after some years of planning and waiting, of the visitor information sign in the barbecue shelter at Red Rocks. Despite several annoying typographical errors, the sign has been enthusiastically received as attractive and informative, and will no doubt greatly assist visitors in appreciating the many natural assets Red Rocks has to offer. We are grateful to the publishing committee of the "Come For a Walk" book for generously providing funds for that project, and for their patience in seeing it reach fruition.

While we have been blessed with funding for the above projects for 2012, our greatest asset is, of course, our volunteers. A mixture of PICS members and local residents/holiday home owners, overall they contributed 90 hours of hard work over 7 working bees throughout the year. As usual, we concentrated on weed control, rubbish clean-up, and planting of over 300 indigenous coastal plants. A new venture was the control of Sea Spurge on the beach by hand-pulling the weed, and good progress has been made, especially in the main beach area near the carpark, and in the Hooded Plover breeding ground. Seed collection and propagation of Coast Beard Heath also continued, again with some success and more knowledge gained. Many thanks to our wonderful volunteers, and to the Bass Coast Shire Council, particularly Dave Martin, the Natural Resources Officer, who guides our endeavours and provides all the equipment, materials and plants.

Some of our members have been heavily committed to the Hooded Plover Watch at Red Rocks, and while this is not specifically a Coastcare initiative, it has become a major focus of community involvement in the area. There was great joy when two chicks fledged in February after a lengthy period of watchfulness by dedicated Hoodie volunteers. The parent birds returned again to the site in Spring to breed, but the first two nesting attempts were washed out by storms and high tide. Great hopes were held for the third attempt, with three eggs laid in a much safer location on the foredune, but despite the many hours of guarding and monitoring by volunteers, and good cooperation from the local community of beach users and dog-walkers, that attempt also failed when ravens apparently took the eggs. A special tribute is due to PICS member Sue Saliba, and husband Bruno, who coordinated the volunteer effort, and put in so much time and energy to care for this endangered species.

The problem of beach fires over the Christmas holiday period was a major issue, and is continuing. Not only does this litter the beach with half-burnt logs, and present a considerable fire threat to foreshore vegetation and adjacent properties, but fuel for such illegal fires is usually dragged from the foreshore, creating damage to sensitive dune vegetation and removing natural cover that normally helps protect against wind erosion. A classic example of this occurred at the newly fenced coup at Red Rocks Point where brush the Council had laid and wired down for us to plant amongst was ripped out for beach fires, leaving bare sand and trailing loose wire. An effective strategy to counteract this destructive practice is difficult to find as Council rangers do not work at night. People are directed by Council and the CFA to contact the police if fires are noticed.

However, despite these few problems, and with the continuing great support of our volunteers, the work of Red Rocks Coastcare promises to be just as challenging and productive in 2013 as it was in 2012.

John Eddy, Red Rocks Coastcare coordinator

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

We started the year with Lee from Animals of Oz bringing a variety of birds, marsupials, amphibians and reptiles in a wonderful educational show and tell for the children. She brought each animal out from its covered container one at a time, told the children about each one's habitat and behaviour, and taught the children how to gently stroke the animals.

We had about 50 children attend, and the adults were as intrigued as the children. Her visit was funded by Bass Coast Shire Council and PICS.

PICS once again participated in the Bass Coast Shire Council's Environment Expo, which is normally held near World Environment Day on June 5th, but this year we all decided it was too cold and miserable then, and transferred it to November, giving the schools notice from the beginning of the year. It was very successful, with all of the major environment agencies in Bass Coast Shire presenting activities and stands, and the three voluntary organisations on Phillip Island – FOK, PICS and Bird Life Bass Coast – all participating. 450 children came through, with 300 sitting in the hall for the last session and hearing several members of the Deep Listening Band, down for the Shearwater Festival, entertaining them with aboriginal songs, chants and stories.

Christine Grayden.