

2023 Victorian Landcare Grants - Melbourne Water CMA Region

Final Report

Send your completed final report to landcare@melbournewater.com.au

1. Project details

Project number: VLG 2023 211

Project title: Restoration of the Koonya Grassy Bowl and Moonah Woodland, Blairgowrie: a community, school and volunteer partnership.

Group/organisation: Blairgowrie Friends of Mornington Peninsula National Park

2. Project objectives

What were the original aims or intentions of the project? Refer to your project application in SmartyGrants. Please contact landcare@melbournewater.com.au if you are unable to locate application.

Goal:

Our ultimate goal is to restore the natural biodiversity (“health”) of a Calcareous Swale Grassland and adjoining Moonah Woodland (endangered and threatened EVC’s/plant communities respectively) at Koonya Beach in Blairgowrie.

Project Aims:

- To rehabilitate a degraded and weed-invaded Grassy Bowl and Moonah Woodland at Koonya Ocean Beach within Mornington Peninsula National Park in order to improve the habitat for indigenous species of flora and fauna, particularly iconic and rare native species. Significant work is envisaged over a period of 3 years to improve vegetation quality.
- To inspire students and environmental volunteers to actively care for the local environment.

Objectives for Year 1 (2024 grant period):

1. Reduce and control invasive weeds to liberate existing indigenous plants and promote natural regeneration.

2. Replant species characteristic of these EVC's which are not well represented or are not present.
 3. Broaden volunteer base and community engagement, by involving Rosebud Secondary College (RSC), Deakin students, local residents and visitors.
 4. Build volunteer environmental knowledge and skills. through active participation in all aspects of the project and through educational activities and training led by local environmental experts.
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3. Methods

What methods or processes did the group use to achieve the projects aims? Eg Weed Control. – two sites measuring 2ha were worked on where blackberry was removed by mechanical means. If reporting community events what type of event was run.

Objective 1 - Reduce and control invasive weeds to liberate existing indigenous plants and promote natural regeneration.

Weed Treatment Approach:

- Confirmed with expert ecologist priority weeds for removal, methods and focus areas.
 - Focus areas were higher quality areas containing remnant grasses or understorey or ground story within the Grassy Bowl (not the Coastal Moonah Woodland on eastern and southern slopes of the Bowl).
 - Priority 1 weed *Rhamnus alaternus* (Italian Buckthorn) which was mainly in the western part of the Grassy Bowl was cut low to the ground and painted with herbicide. Cut plants were left in place.
 - Priority 2 weed *Dipogon lignosus* (Dolichos Pea) which was scattered throughout the Bowl was either pulled out or cut and painted with herbicide. Cuttings were removed to tip.
 - Priority 3 weed *Polygala myrtifolia* (Polygala) was the most extensive weed and dominated the eastern side of the Grassy Bowl. It was removed by cutting stems close to soil level, using hand and electric cutting tools. A substantial proportion of this weed was left untreated following Parks Victoria and ecologist advice to retain shelter for animals. The remaining cut polygala was removed to the tip.
 - Priority 4 weed *Delairea odorata* (Cape Ivy) which was mainly in the western part of the Grassy Bowl and closely interspaced with other plants was pulled by hand and removed to tip.
 - Other weeds were removed as follows:
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- *Asparagus asparagoides* (Bridal Creeper) was not a high priority weed, as rust fungus biological control agent has been released in the National Park. In dense patches of the weed rhizomes were dug up
- *Erhata erecta* (Panic veldt grass) was hand weeded.
- Boxthorn, Cotoneaster Olive, Thistle and Bitou Bush were treated.
- Weeding in the Bowl ceased once areas had been seeded/left to regenerate in Spring 2024.
- Conducted a total of 18 working bees throughout 2024. These working bees variously involved BFMPNP volunteers, Rosebud Secondary College students and teacher volunteers and contractors.
- Employed several local environmental contractors to provide weeding and invasive plant management, working at all times with volunteers.
- Weed removal and ground preparation were the largest components of the more than 1475 total hours of contractor and volunteer time spent on the project in 2024.

Objective 2 - Replant species characteristic of these EVC's which are not well represented or are not present.

Seeding Approach:

- Volunteers undertook seed harvesting from local areas with a contractor. We hold a native species seed collection permit.
- 5 weeded, high quality, focus areas in the base of the Bowl, were lightly raked.
- The locally-sourced indigenous seeds (predominantly 6 varieties of native grasses, but also several missing species such as *Allocasuarina verticillate* and *Banksia integrifolia*) were spread.

Replanting Approach:

- 350 tubes of native grasses, correas and leucopogons of local provenance, donated to the project by a local indigenous plant nursery were planted along the Lifesaving Track contiguous to the Bowl, down to Spray Point junction and provided with plastic guards by RSC and other volunteers during a number of working bees.

Objective 3 - Broaden volunteer base and community engagement, by involving Rosebud Secondary College (RSC), local residents and visitors.

Activities aimed at raising awareness and volunteer participation included:

- Joint working bees throughout 2024 to give Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 Rosebud Secondary College Outdoor Education students hands-on field work alongside our experienced volunteers and occasionally Parks Victoria rangers. Padua College also participated.
- 18 working bees/events publicized through the BFMPNP website, social media, email list and posters in local meeting places and on the walking path near the site.
- A joint working bee event held with Mornington Peninsula Intrepid Landcare and promoted through local environmental youth social media.
- A project briefing given to the Sorrento Environment Circle.
- A project briefing given to the Mayor of Mornington Peninsula Shire.
- An i-Naturalist BioBlitz project completed on-site.
- A website created (<https://bfmpnp.org>) to provide information on the project, photographic and written records of the project and useful information on the local natural history. The website has logged more than 3600 hits in 2024.
- Numerous reports and updates on this project were provided to our volunteers and the public via our website blog: <https://bfmpnp.org> and our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100087339472443>
- Signage prepared and placed in situ before and during working bees publicized our activities.
- Promoted our activities in the newsletter of the local neighbourhood group Spray Point Area Conservation Group.

Objective 4 - Build volunteer environmental knowledge and skills.

Developing volunteer knowledge and skills in many aspects of conservation and management of the local habitat were the focus of the following activities:

- Planning workshop and review meetings with local environmental experts, Gidja Walker OAM and Malcolm Legg.
- In-the-field plant and animal identification/education, seed collection and weed control method sessions led by Gidja and Malcolm.
- Educational sessions by Gidja and Malcolm at the Intrepid Landcare joint working bee.
- Field trip with Gidja, Friends of Point Nepean and Point Nepean Parks Ranger to learn about the management of a similar pristine Calcareous Grassy Bowl at Point Nepean National Park, followed by a working bee in Coastal Moonah Woodland.

- Four Deakin University volunteer students assisted in the project during their industry placement programs. In addition to participating in the working bees, the students provided important input into the following projects:
 - Collation of data to create comprehensive flora and fauna lists of all species observed within KGBMW,
 - A weed management calendar and a how-to manual of successful methods of weed eradication, adapted from documents originally prepared for us by Gidja Walker OAM and available on our website.
 - Education session and event planning for the Intrepid Landcare event held in March 2024.
 - Creating an iNaturalist project (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/koonya-grassy-bowl-and-moonah-woodland>) to increase public scientific engagement and provide volunteers with access to more expert opinions.
 - Establishing mapped GPS photograph points to monitor environmental change over time.
 - Created an information video about our work to preserve Calcareous Swale Grasslands.
- Photographic surveys of the site were also undertaken as follows:
 - Conducted several wildlife camera surveys to identify important fauna within the KGBMW.
 - The KGBMW was extensively surveyed by drone photography at the beginning and end of the works.
 - Camera photopoints were established and geologged, with photos taken along the points three times during 2024.
- A website was created by a volunteer (<https://bfmpnp.org>) to record and manage all of the above activities and make data and information available to the public. The website has recorded more than 3600 hits in 2024.

4. Results (for this grant funding only)

4a. Description

Describe in detail the major results of the project, include specifics of work undertaken e.g. controlled weeds [Weeds](#)

[information](#) | [Weeds](#) | [Biosecurity](#) | [Agriculture Victoria](#) and how the project contributes to a strategic plan or how the sites' work contributes to landscape repair

Objective 1 - Reduce and control invasive weeds to liberate existing indigenous plants and promote natural regeneration.

- Highly invasive weeds in the base of the Bowl (the Calcareous Swale Grassland) have been greatly reduced and controlled as follows:
 - All visible Priority 1 weed (*Rhamnus alaternus*) removed
 - All visible Priority 2 weed (*Dipogon lignosus*) removed
 - All Priority 3 weed (*Polygala myrtifolia*) removed
 - Large individuals of Priority 4 weed (*Delairea odorata*) removed (some small, immature individuals remain intertwined with vegetation at low levels).
 - The most concentrated patch of *Asparagus asparagoides* (Bridal Creeper) was removed
 - All *Erhata erecta* was removed from understorey of the southern re-seeded area.
 - All Boxthorn, Gazania, Cotoneaster, Olive, Thistle and Bitou Bush were removed or treated.
- Some signs of regeneration in parts of the Bowl are *Dianella sp.* in the trackside patch and scattered, early colonizing species such as *Clematis microphilla* and *Swainsonia lessertifolia* in the areas cleared of Polygala.
- Indigenous grass tussocks in the “grassy patches” have been greatly reduced in size and show evidence of grazing by rabbits.

Objective 2 - Replant species characteristic of these EVC's which are not well represented or are not present

- The replanting of tubestock happened outside the KGBMW, on the Lifesaving Track contiguous to the KGBMW

Seeding:

- Seed collection and sowing occurred as planned.
- In November 2024 no evidence of grasses sprouting, possibly due to rabbits. Too early to assess annual species as planting occurred only in spring 2024.

Objective 3 - Broaden volunteer base and community engagement, by involving Rosebud Secondary College (RSC), local residents and visitors.

- A regular program of weeding and environmental education was established with the Rosebud Secondary College (RSC).
- The RSC students and teachers were very enthusiastic. Many of the students have participated more than once and have deepened their understanding of bushland management.
- See attached letter from RSC.
- A regular program of Deakin University student placements was established, providing the students with valuable practical experience.
- New volunteer engagement increased by 47 members attending at various times during 2024.
- The new website, blogs, social media and poster advertising of our events have significantly raised the profile of the KGBMW and our volunteer group.
- We grew our Facebook audience by double during 2024 and also established our own website, which has logged more than 3600 visits in 2024. We now have 130 people on our regular email update list.
- Project briefings, educational and working bee sessions with other local environmental groups, as well as participation in Mornington Peninsula Landcare, have significantly raised the profile of the KGBMW environment.

Objective 4 - Build volunteer environmental knowledge and skills.

All events held have provided opportunities for enhancing environmental knowledge and skill levels of volunteers and attracted a good level of participation.

In addition to the events, reference materials have been built upon and made available to the volunteers, such as the Weeding Calendar and Weed Management documents, comprehensive flora and fauna lists and all reports, newsletters and photos of the site and about the project.

The volunteer community has gained enhanced knowledge and skills in:

- a) plant identification (specifically the endangered remnant native vegetation and the environmental weeds which are currently on-site),
- b) weed control methods,
- c) revegetation and habitat restoration principles and planning,
- d) seed collection,
- e) monitoring,
- f) biodiversity enhancement,
- g) promotion and holding events.

Biodiversity data on the project site has been significantly increased and will be an ongoing resource for volunteer and land management work:

- Photo points along transects providing a digitally mapped and photographic timeline of the project.
- Comprehensive overhead photographic drone survey of before and after photos.
- Wildlife camera surveys identifying important fauna.
- A collated list of flora and fauna species within KGBMW.
- An iNaturalist project was established to increase public and scientific engagement and provide volunteers with access to more expert opinions. In 2024, 60 observers logged 458 observations of 158 species in total.

4b. Map/spatial data:

You must provide a map of your project location identifying all activities. There are several ways to do this. Submitting your map electronically in a spatial format (.kml or .kmz files (Google Earth) , ESRI shape files (ArcMap, DELWP Mapshare), Map Info, QGIS or other formats) is preferred. Alternatively, an annotated aerial photo with drawings showing the location and type of works can be submitted. Properties can be located at [MapshareVic](#)

.kmz map of the project site attached to this report

Google Earth map can also be accessed at:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1e24yD4Tgt4aNjevuJLEqTqd6BwiGqBY&ll=-38.362241486499045%2C144.75365215000002&z=18>

4c. Name of officer employed (if relevant)

If a project officer was supported using funds from the PPWCMA Community Grants their name needs to be supplied.

N/A

4d. Attachments

Please attach/submit all photos or materials produced that show the outcomes of activities funded via this project (eg. Revegetation sites, fencing, field days, promotional material, management plans etc).

See attached Zip file of photos etc.

4e. Project outcomes

What are the outputs your project achieved? Only complete outputs relevant to your project's delivery. Select the most appropriate output(s) from the output list below and enter the quantity achieved.

Outputs	Measure	Qty
Structural Works – Nest box	Number	
Structural Works – Fence Length	Km	
Structural Works – Area protected/improved	Ha	
Revegetation:	Total ha	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Native Indigenous modify (top-up revegetation, i.e. additional plantings in remnant native vegetation)	No. plants	350
<input type="checkbox"/> Native indigenous establish (new planting of native indigenous plants in a non-vegetated area e.g. paddock shelterbelt)		
Weed control - please specify species name: Polygala myrtifolia, Mediterranean Buck, Italian Boxthorn, Dolichos, Pittosporum, Cotoneaster, Cape Ivy, Boneseed (Bitou)	Ha	5
Click or tap here to enter text.	No. sites	1
Pest animal control – herbivore Click or tap here to enter text.	Ha	
	No sites	
Engagement Events – (all values)	No of events	22
Engagement Events - participants	No of participants	77
Planning & Regulations - Assessments	No of Assessments	3
Planning & Regulations – Plans (All values)	No of plans	5

Outputs	Measure	Qty
Volunteers – volunteers working on VLG project Click or tap here to enter text.	Total number of volunteers	70
Volunteers – Volunteers hours contributed to VLG project	Number of hours	1475

Other outputs (eg, project signage, monitoring using photo points)	Measure	Qty
Photopoints		22
Overhead drone photos		120
Signage		4

5. Expenditure summary

All receipts/invoices and/or other payment documentation must be included and itemised to validate expenditure

Activity (As per your approved project submission)	Components	Unit and unit price	Quantity	Total cost for activity	Melbourne Water VLG Grant funding expended	Other cash contribution (source and amount)	In-kind contribution
Revegetation	Site preparation by contractors: weeding, ground preparation and supervision	Various (see attached invoices)	400 hours	\$21332	\$21332	Nil	\$40,000
Revegetation	Plants, guards and stakes. Planting by Volunteers 40 people x 100 @ \$30/hr.	Various (see attached invoices)	500 sets	\$875.53	\$875.53	\$0	\$23,000
Communications: Website and email	Website and email	Various (see attached invoices)		\$1023.94	\$1023.94	\$0	\$0
Food following events		Various		\$273.89	\$273.89	\$0	\$0
Insurance		invoice		\$30	\$30		
Total expenditure				\$23535.36			
Total Melbourne Water VLG funds approved					\$22,000		\$63,000

Balance Melbourne Water VLG funds remaining	\$0		
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Unspent VLG funds: if there are any unspent funds associated with this project, on what aspects of the project will they be spent and when? Melbourne Water will have discretion on use of any unspent funds and this may result in a variation to the project.

No unspent funds

6. Conclusions

Has the project been successful in meeting its objectives? What lessons have been learnt? What ongoing works are required? What will be the legacy of the project (**please refer to SmartyGrants original application to help explain how delivery compared to expected outcomes**).

Environmental Outcomes

Invasive weeds were identified as a key threat to the health of the KGBMW. A desired outcome was the elimination of invasive weeds such as Polygala, Sweet Pittosporum, Buckthorns, Boxthorns and Cotoneaster) and vines/climbers and creepers (such as Ivies and Dolichos).

Boosting the representation of species characteristic of the EVCs was another desired outcome through seeding with seeds of local provenance.

The intended outcome of both of these activities was identified as a more biodiverse and “healthier” site providing habitat for several iconic and endangered species of flora and fauna.

The result (at least in the short term) has been a successful removal of key weed species.

The seeding conducted in Spring 2024 has not yet had time to show significant results. Some of the species are not due to germinate until Winter 2025. The lack of germination in the short term may be due to a number of factors such as seed viability, seasonal conditions, or animals eating the seeds or young shoots. Rabbit activity in the Bowl has increased and this may be a factor affecting both the success of seeding and natural regeneration. Existing grasses have also been reduced, likely through grazing, by rabbits or possibly wallabies. Further investigation is required to address these issues.

In the short term it is possible that at least grassland habitat has diminished rather than increased and diversified. Plants in the more mixed scrubby habitat (e.g. Coast wattles, Ti-tree, Sword sedge, Tetragonia, Rhagodia) have been freed from smothering climbing weeds and are in an improved condition. A track-side patch containing *Dianella* sp. shows signs of improvement.

Community Engagement and Capacity Building

A very successful working relationship with the RSC students and teachers has been established with students undertaking working bees during school hours. The broader school community has not been engaged to date.

Parks Victoria has had a lower level of involvement than expected. This appears to be due to resourcing issues. .

Strong relationships have been established with local experts and other landcarers including Mornington Peninsula Landcare leaders and independent environmental consultants and contractors.

Considerable effort has gone into publicising our working bees and events. More than 1200 hours of volunteer time and 43 new volunteers were involved in restoring the KGBMW as a result of the project.

These activities have also had excellent attendance by regular BFMPNP volunteers, indicating good volunteer retention. A small number of new and regular volunteers have been recruited from the local resident population.

Awareness within the general local community of our activities and the KGBMW's flora and fauna has increased substantially also through our new website and social media.

Visitors to Koonya Beach have not been engaged to any significant degree. A lack of signage might be a reason, due to our failure to obtain Parks Vic approval for our project signage.

The regular involvement of local experts has been particularly helpful for maintaining volunteer interest and enhancing volunteer skills in plant identification, weed control and other aspects of habitat restoration, and building University students' understanding of working with volunteers in environmental management,

Legacy

This project has increased awareness of the endangered Calcareous Swale Grassland EVC and has inspired and skilled locals (including school children) to help look after it as well as nearby Coastal Moonah Woodland and Coast Alkaline Scrub.

Large quantities of invasive weeds have been removed, making a contribution to weed control in the MPNP which is identified as a priority issue in the 'Parks Victoria Conservation Action Plan: Western Port and South-east Melbourne parks and reserves managed by Parks Victoria' (September 2021). By ultimately boosting habitat for native fauna, our project complements the Parks Victoria Introduced Predator Management Program. Success of this project will also support the coastal biolink of the Linking the Mornington Peninsula Landscapes project.

Our records of the biodiversity of the site have enhanced data on the ecology of the area. Much of this knowledge is publicly available on our website.

Ongoing work

The project has achieved its first year objectives but there is still work to be completed, in particular protecting treated areas from herbivores, Funds were sought for 2025 (unsuccessfully) and will be sought again in 2026 to complete the project.

7. Contact details for person completing the report

Name: Norm O'Bryan

Phone number: 0419290857

Email: nobryan57@gmail.com

8. Office bearers/delegated authority:

Name: Sally Eldridge **Date:** 30 Nov 2024

Position held: Committee Chair

Name: Sue Noy **Date:** 30 Nov 2024

Position held: Committee Member

To avoid having to resubmit your reporting please ensure all sections are complete.

- Have you completed all sections of the report?
- Have you submitted/attached your map of works?
- Have you submitted/attached all project material?
- Does your budget balance?
- Have you included copies of all receipts/invoices and an itemised summary?
- Are the contact details correct?
- Has the report been signed by the appropriate delegated representatives?