BEAM President’s Report 2022

Another year and the environmental challenges we face in our community, and across our planet, continue to grow. A recent scientific review into our changing climate suggested we will reach the 1.5oC climate tipping point in 9 years. We clearly have an existential challenge in front of us, but we knew that anyway. Did someone mention urgency here?

However, the past 12 months has seen some good news for our BEAM Mitchell Environment Group., some things to celebrate.

BEAM has a focus on 4 main activity areas

1. Biodiversity and Tallarook Forest and Natural Treasures

2. Waste working group – recycling / repurposing

3. Renewables / Climate Change

4. Planning Mitchell Shire

1. **Biodiversity and Tallarook Forest and Natural Treasures**

STTF has been a major focus of our BEAM year, albeit not the only one. Paul Macgregor has spent long hours leading this campaign.

It looks like the Tallarook Forest has been saved from logging by VicForests. On Friday 4 November, Justice Miranda Richards handed down a decision in the Supreme Court regarding the Kinglake Friends of the Forest case against VicForests - a case which aimed to protect the nationally endangered Greater Glider from logging activity in the Central Highlands, which includes the Tallarook Forest. Justice Richards found that

*VicForests had been conducting illegal logging for years, willfully ignoring the Precautionary Principle, choosing not to survey for the presence of Greater Gliders, and conducting clearfell logging which has been destroying the habitat of these gliders.*

A week later, on 11 November, Justice Richards issued court orders to VicForests, mandating them to conduct thorough and systematic surveys for Greater Gliders in all proposed logging coupes, and across the whole of each coupe. All Greater Gliders detected will be required to have their home range protected from logging. On top of this, 60 per cent of the remaining harvestable area of a coupe should not be logged, and all streams will now have 50m on each side of the stream protected from logging. This included temporary waterways as well as permanently flowing streams.

A parallel case in East Gippsland, run by Environment East Gippsland, received a similar judgment.

**The effect of all this is to demonstrate that economically viable logging, and Greater Glider preservation, cannot go hand in hand.** It is unlikely that any logging in forests where Greater Gliders live will ever be logged again in either the Central Highlands, or in East Gippsland.

Surveys conducted in the Tallarook Forests for Greater Gliders by BEAM and DELWP from August 2020 to July 2022, found over 150 Greater Gliders, in the areas that VicForests wants to log. This is a very high population of these animals**. It will be uneconomic for VicForests to log the Tallarook Forest under the conditions ordered by Justice Richards.**

Over 80 members of the community have taken part in our Greater Glider Surveys.

The Tallarook Forest has a reprieve from logging, but there are other goals we are working towards for the Forest. **Our ultimate aim is to have the Forest transformed into a conservation area,** valued for its biodiversity, beauty, old growth qualities, Taungurung cultural heritage, carbon storage, and recreational values.

On other fronts:

• Over 2021-2022, BEAM has engaged the services of consultant ecologist Karl Just. Karl is an expert in flora surveying, especially the detection of rare species. So far we have commissioned him to conduct rare flora surveys, and have found several endangered species, including an important population of the long-leaf cinnamon wattle (Acacia leprosa var. uninervia). He has also commenced a survey of risk to the forest from poorly managed planned burns. A report on this will available in the near future.

• BEAM has also commenced discussions with DELWP to develop more walking trails in the Tallarook Forest.

• BEAM was a founding member of the Victorian Forest Alliance, in November 2021, and BEAM committee member Paul Macgregor is on the VFA committee(Treasurer).

• BEAM has opened discussion with the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance to investigate the development of a wildlife corridor between the Tallarook Forest and Mt Disappointment Forest, especially to encourage Greater Gliders to migrate from the Tallarook Forest to the Mt Disappointment Forest.

• BEAM has conducted surveys in Mt Disappointment State Forest and Black Range State Forest.

Further to the two Supreme Court cases referred to before, the **Vic Auditor-General’s Office** handed down a report in October that was scathing of the Office of Conservation Regulator and their failures to manage the native forest logging industry in Victoria.

And amongst all of the engagement and citizen science of the STTF campaign, we managed **a social event at Ellen Koshland and Patrick McCaughey’s place on the edge of the forest**…way back in December last year. [Ellen and James are generous supporters of BEAM’s firest campaign]. Many of us want it again, more often, and some music. *There must be fun and celebration in championing conservation.*

**More Glider good news.**

Recently, a Squirrel Glider was identified on Heywoods Hill in Seymour, the first sighting in 20 years. Chris Pocknee (Biolinks Alliance), Bert Lobert (Strathbogie Forest Protection group) and Emily Buchanan (local resident) were involved. We published this on our Facebook page.

There is potential for a campaign of study, and possibly the public purchase of the hill as a parkland.

Georgia W drafted a media release for local press to highlight the discovery.

**Natural Treasures**

The popular and informative Natural Treasures leaflet that has been available for years, is in the process of an upgrade. Life member Bob Thomkins was involved in the original production, and Peter Mitchell has taken on this task of update. An application for funding through our regional Landcare was not successful (a bit over $2k), but the Dabyminga Catchment Co-operative may be able to assist. They have an AGM next week.

1. **Waste working group recycling / repurposing**

It has been a tough year for recycling- at scale, this continues to be challenging at the government and industry end.

Recently, the RED scheme has been suspended (soft plastics to supermarkets) but we can expect it to resume in due course.

In the Age, Saturday Nov 12th there was a good article about the status of our plastics reduction and recycling nationally, with Victoria being the best performing State. However a wander through a supermarket, or make an on-line purchase, and one sees the pervasive nature of plastics in our world. These valuable fossil fuel products will be with us for a long time. They are certainly too valuable for land-fill, or choking our oceans.

BEAM returned to the **Seymour Show** in October.

Despite quite a bit of work to prep and set-up, we had lots of conversations on Saturday. Sharing a stall with Landcare was a great boost. There were lots of sign-ups to our Save The Tallarook Forest campaign .Engaging with the Show Committee on waste and recycling was somewhat tricky (Ruth and Peter L), and clearly there is more work to do to support the Show Committee in this area. The GV Water fountains went ok – albeit the positions meant that some of them had hot water coming out! Colouring-in activities were well received, and plants for display and purchase were popular, as was the Landcare drone on display.

Thanks to volunteers Peter M, Peter L, Kerry from Landcare, Vanessa, Ruth, Marie, and David at the show.

1. **Renewables / Climate Change**

BEAM and Mitchell Community Energy continue to be active with Council and its Environment Department through quarterly meetings. WE have been disappointed at the inability of Council to establish the car park PV shade structure to date. That’s more than $100,000 annually that could be saved, and lots of emissions. The stalled Chittick Park Master Plan keeps getting the blame, but this is expected to be completed by June 30 next year. BEAM/MCE also continue to push for a Solar Farm on the former tip site on Hume and Hovell Road in Seymour. Next year may see this get to a development stage (see below).

EV charging stations, home energy and water audit kits, energy efficiency upgrades to Council buildings, and the replacement of gas with heat pumps on the Seymour Sports and Aquatic Centre are some of the achievements our meetings have had a hand in. Mitchell Shire was the second-worst performing Shire in Victoria last year for the uptake of renewable energy, but the Council’s Environment Department has been very active since then. Their *Acknowledgement of a Climate Emergency* last year (which followed BEAM’s address to Council in March 2021) has been the cornerstone of action on climate change, emissions and renewables across all Council departments.

Mitchell Shire is currently calling for community representatives to join the Climate Emergency Community Reference Group to help develop the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan.

1. **Planning in Mitchell Shire**

WE have not been so active in this space this year. The Broadford Structure Plan further develops, the Seymour Anzac Avenue Streetscape planning is happening (albeit limping and caught up with floods to disrupt its timetable), we have made comment to the Planning Scheme amendment that brings the Shire scheme in line with the State in terms of language, in the main.

We have had the odd conversation with MSC about a greater engagement with our Tallarook Forest campaign, including its promotion for the many other virtues that a living forest can offer. A work in progress.

An grumpy email to Council a few months back expressing disquiet about park upgrades in Chittick Park whilst the Master Plan has yet to surface (and the car park rooftop PV generation is on hold), resulted in a meeting with 3 senior staff members in early November. A resultant commitment to engage with us closer on that Master Plan, and its renewable energy opportunities was a good outcome.

By and large, BEAM and Mitchell Community Energy have a **positive working relationship with Council.** Our new Mayor, and previous Mayors have expressed their appreciation of this.

**The Seymour flood** can be expected to throw a spotlight back onto flood mitigation. We miss Peter Mitchell in this planning space, but we know he is available for support.

**Other.**

How BEAM communicates.

**Social media** Georgia Webster manages our social media in the main, with Georgia and Paul handling the Tallarook Forest FB posts and emails. Peter Gaffney also does Events posts.

* The BEAM Facebook page has 586 page likes... a small growth of 19 new likes in 2 months since the october BEAM committee meeting. It is notable that our Tallarook Forest campaign draws more interest than our BEAM FB.
* Posts on our website
* Emails as required.

**EarthChat.**  Has been *On Air* for more than 6 years. Presenters now number 4, with interest from 2 others. Its competitive. David Clarey, Marie Gerrard, Ruth Yeatman, Kate Auty and Peter Lockyer.

**Seymour FM was flooded in the October floods**. The new station will be in Pollard Street. A temporary on-air facility has been established as the studios fit-out is completed.

**BEAM Stalls as a public interface.** These are effective engagement activities, but exhausting. Tahbilk Tahbilk Seymour Show Tallarook Market

BEAM also communicates with various submissions, emails and meetings- not listed here

Thanks to Ruth Yeatman for filtering incoming emails, and forwarding them..

**Memberships** are managed by Peter Gaffney., and Peter has taken up the role of Secretary.

**As of October** Total current members: 41 members, 41 family members, 10 Life, 20 overdue memberships

The big picture. We are facing increasing climate extremes…as the science has predicted. Biodiversity loss is huge, and yet governments continue with contradictions (climate action… but its ok for native forest culling and more coal and gas?). Are we at the behest of Mike Cannon-Brookes and Twiggy Forrest? Or Putin, or Trump. Our challenges as a regional environment group are huge. **We must not lose our courage.**

**Federal election last May.** Phew, the end of 3 (or 8) dark years, and some expectation of rapid and strong action on climate, equity and transparency. The Albanese government tip-toes at times, but has made a good start. CoP27 appears a big disappointment. Fossil fuel lobbying is clearly powerful, and existential threats are not. A bright light: The process to a Voice to Parliament is a challenge, but exciting.

**State election**- maybe a hung parliament? We expect **Annabel Cleeland** to win in Euroa. We have plans for strong representation to her on the Tallarook Ranges. The State Government leads Australia’s reset on our relationship with First Nations People, and the process of *Treaty*. There is a lot of interest from BEAM members in this process.

**Teaming with Landcare**. VP Vanessa Malendrin continues doing impressive work with urban Landcare. The tree planting in Abdullah Road along Whiteheads Creek on land managed by Goulburn Water saw 60 people planting, back on National Tree Day in July. Then it all got washed away. This is a good urban project with good engagement with the public, plus increasing habitat health.

BEAM plans our annual EOY picpic there on Sunday 11th. Opposite Richard and Kunie’s place. Some work, some play and celebration after.

Our revegetation work at Permacroft has had a good year of growth, but no further planting over the past year. As Permacroft establishes a clear plan going forward, we expect boots on the ground again.

**Our failings?** These are various, but more social events would be valuable.

BEAM has lots of unfinished business, but with your support wherever and whenever, we can continue to have a positive impact in our community.

**Thankyou.**

To Rebecca Welsh for sharing the Treaty conversation and campaign at this AGM

To our members, benefactors, supporters who aren’t members, to Ruth Yeatman, and to

our retiring **committee**

Vanessa Malandrin VP Georgia Webster Secretary and media, Irene Telford, Treasurer for 7 years, Paul Macgregor David Atkinson, Peter Gaffney Marie Gerrard, David Clarey

Peter Lockyer, President 2021-22 20 october 2022