



Victorian Environment
FRIENDS NETWORK

VEFN Welcome Pack



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The Victorian Environment Friends Network is proud to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which we live and work.

We value and respect their deep and continued spiritual and cultural connections to the land, waters and seas, and pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders past, present and future.

The Victorian Environment Network
is run *by* volunteers *for* volunteers



Introduction

The Victorian Environment Friends Network (VEFN) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation advocating and promoting environmental volunteering through Environment Groups in Victoria.

We represent Friends Groups, including individual environmental volunteers as well as associated groups and agencies, and support their on-ground conservation efforts.

Friend Groups are as varied as the landscapes they work in, from urban environments to coastlines, riverbanks, and bushland settings. Friends Groups may work with a variety of management authorities such as DEECA, Local Councils, Parks Victoria, Water Authorities, or represent other groups caring for nature such as Field Naturalists or Gardens for Wildlife Victoria.

We provide a strong and united voice for the environmental volunteers and the valuable work they do. We empower, promote, support and connect individual groups in the many regions of Victoria, through events, workshops, our website and key initiatives.

We represent over 150+ Friends Groups and Networks across Victoria with a reach of approximately 6,500 individual environmental volunteers and associated groups and agencies.



VEFN Committee

Our Committee has an important ongoing agenda, working on behalf of Friends Groups. This includes quantifying and valuing volunteer contributions; securing funding and support for VEFN and Friends Groups; supporting Friends Groups to network and mentor and being a strong advocate for nature and environmental volunteering.

Current Committee

Anthony Bigelow, Convenor
Laura Mumaw, Deputy Convenor
Margaret Hunter, Secretary
John Orr, Treasurer
Carol Challis, Committee Member
Dr Nadine Richings, Committee Member
Callum Clarke, Committee Member
Jessica Gerger, Committee Member
Clive Edington, Committee Member
Judith Baldacchino, Committee Member
Graham Ross, Committee Member
Andrew Lucas, Committee Member



Get in touch!
info@vefn.org.au

Sub-committees & Working Groups

We welcome individuals to join us on our sub-committees. We have many active sub-committees and working groups covering a wide range of topics.

1

Website Development

Steer and coordinate the upgrade and redevelopment of VEFN's website including structure, functionality and content.

2

Awards/Best Friend Award

Coordinate the VEFN Awards by reviewing and promoting Awards, overseeing the judging process, organisation of the Award ceremony.

3

Sponsorship/Grants

Seek funding opportunities through various avenues including grants and sponsorships.

4

Parks Victoria

Share concerns and develop solutions for policy and administrative problems which hinder effective relationships with Parks Victoria.

5

Education, Skills and Training

Research and promote relevant education, skills updates and training for environmental volunteers including the provision of networking opportunities.

6

Membership Recruitment

Increase VEFN membership by reviewing benefits of membership, connecting with existing and potential members, and seeking feedback for improvement.

7

Regional Network Development

Build connections between VEFN and regional based Friends Groups, and their local agencies and authorities.

[Get in touch](#) to see how you can contribute with your experience and knowledge. We'd love to hear from you!

Growing Our Reach and Impact

We need your help to create a vibrant and sustainable platform for environmental volunteering. Please [get in touch](#) to see how you can contribute to these initiatives.

VEFN Future Strategy

Create a roadmap and set priorities that renew our leadership and modes of operation to meet today's realities, stimulate emerging leaders and harness new technologies

Education/advocacy

The VEFN has various education initiatives to raise awareness and increase knowledge and understanding among the community about what we do and why it is important, and also to build the knowledge and skills of our community of Friends groups. One of the most critical actions is create policies that drive effective actions at all levels of society, from government, to industry, the corporate and not-for-profit sectors. We use our voices and relationships to influence decision makers through networking, policy, submissions, reports, and lobbying.

Concerned Waterways Alliance

The VEFN have joined the Concerned Waterways Alliance and are active members and participants within the Alliance. The Concerned Waterways Alliance (CWA) is a network of community and environment groups from Gippsland to the Otways. They share a deep concern about the degraded state of southern Victoria's rivers, wetlands and aquifers, and are committed to improving their health for the benefit of current and future generations.

New Website

This project will upgrade the VEFN website to better promote biodiversity and its stewardship to the community. It will support Friends Groups and associates Victoria wide to strengthen and leverage their biodiversity conservation work with partners. This project will deliver a communications platform that inspires the community about the importance of environmental volunteering, facilitates opportunities to get involved, and promotes a collaborative, whole-of-landscape approach to conserving Victorian biodiversity.

Have a voice – marketing

VEFN promotes the work of Friends Groups and the vast number of environmental volunteers working to achieve environmental outcomes across the state. Through our initiatives we create visibility for volunteer groups in order to attract volunteers, community awareness, recognition and funding.

Statements of Purposes

Protect and enhance the natural environment or a significant aspect of the natural environment; and provide information, education or research about the natural environment or a significant aspect of the natural environment, by promoting, supporting and motivating the work of Friends Groups. (Rule 2, Articles of Association).

Our Vision

Protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Victorian natural environment through a thriving community of Friends Groups working for their special places and native species.

Our Mission

One voice to **champion** Friends Groups to governments and authorities

Empower Friends Groups to achieve their objectives

Promote the value of Friends Groups to the community

Support Friends Groups to connect to their communities and get them involved

Help Friends Groups support each other

Membership Benefits

We unite the Friends Groups of Victoria. By becoming a registered member you will connect with environmental volunteers across our magnificent state. We expand your reach and amplify your impact, unlocking a world of possibilities for your volunteers and the flora and fauna we collectively work to protect.



Communications

- ❑ [Friends Bulletin](#)
- ❑ [Member Newsletter](#)
- ❑ [Facebook](#)
- ❑ [Website](#)

Our new VEFN website will be a key platform for promoting and celebrating members and their amazing work. Our website will offer you a place to have a huge profile and celebrate your group.

Policies

This is how we operate:

[Code of conduct](#)

[OHS](#)

[Rules of Association](#)

[Governance Principles](#)

“Our efforts may be local, they may not seem like much, but together they make a patchwork of care, and caring for Country is everything”

Laura Mumaw



VEFN Awards

“... Best Friends inspire others but seldom put themselves forward. They generate enthusiasm and momentum for projects. They also think of others – the morning tea, the lunchtime sandwich, the bowl of water for washing hands ...” – Janet Bolitho promoting the Best Friend Awards in 2021

Best Friend Award – This is our traditional way of recognising people who go above and beyond in their group. These people are active participants, support others, demonstrate leadership, advocate for, and make a personal impact on their area.

Lifetime Achievement Award – Beyond the BFA, the Lifetime Achievement Award recognises the length of service given to a group by an extraordinary individual. It acknowledges the broader and significant contribution given on a strategic level and the impact that this has had on the wider environmental community.

Young Best Friend Award – There are two age group categories for the Young Best Friend Award being for teenagers 15 – 21 years and for children 14 years and younger. Getting younger people involved in caring for their local environment helps them understand their own impact and contributes their skills with leadership, environmental knowledge, and teamwork. It’s good for our future too.

(NEW) Outstanding Environmental Group Award – A champion team gets things done! The purpose of this award is to recognise that there are many people, teamwork, perseverance, and care that contribute to a group’s environmental achievements and successes. If you think a Friends Group, including yours, has made an outstanding impact on your local environment, consider applying.

(NEW) Habitat Connections Award – This award celebrates and encourages connection of habitats for native flora and fauna across patches of public and private land by groups of environmental volunteers and agencies working together. This new award is being launched in 2023 to recognise how important collaboration and connection are to supporting habitat in fragmented environments.

(NEW) CDS Vic Litter Award – Acknowledging the hard work performed by environmental volunteers to keep their special patch of bushland, coastline or waterway free from litter. Although litter is a societal problem, this award rewards groups who are actively addressing the issue through initiatives that involve education, clean-ups and are integrating recycling with CDS Vic in these initiatives.



The VEFN Award Ceremonies are held in conjunction with our AGMs and showcase the amazing work that your group conducts as well as the chance to network with other like minded groups from across Victoria.

Membership

“ ... Friend Group members are like liquorice allsorts.
It takes all sorts to make a Friends Group! ...”

Maelor Himbury's speech for Geoff Durham
recognising his Lifetime Achievement Award

Criteria for VEFN Membership

Please consider joining us if you are a group, incorporated or unincorporated, which supports our purpose – to protect and restore the natural environment and its wildlife – by promoting, supporting, and motivating environmental volunteer groups.

Our members have goals aligned with these:

To provide practical assistance to an indigenous flora or fauna species, a conservation reserve, or an area of environmental interest

To bring people together with, or to develop, a common interest in the area or species

To foster public awareness and support for a conservation reserve, area, or species

Membership Application

[Join here!](#)

History

VEFN: Building a Future on an inspiring past



In recent years the VEFN has focused on improving processes for environmental volunteering with particular attention on Parks Victoria and its new volunteer manual, developing regional environmental volunteer networks with a pilot in the Victoria's Central West/Ballarat area (EVAN), engaging younger generations, and providing training and mentoring activities with partners such as Nature Stewards and BROLGA.

Other VEFN activities continue a long and rich heritage – recognising outstanding environmental volunteering through our Best Friend Awards and making submissions on various Victorian state agencies' environmental, volunteering, and biodiversity strategies.

In 2018 VEFN modified its Constitution to enable registration for ATO Deductible Gift Recipient status and consequently to help auspice groups should that be needed. It was agreed that members would be environmental volunteer groups and networks of groups. Paid membership was instituted at that time. An ongoing and key consideration is how to support and engage individual persons belonging to our member groups and whether another membership category might be appropriate.

Our roots go back to the 1970s and 1980s with the establishment of Friends Groups for some of the national parks and other protected areas across the state by the VNPA (Victorian National Parks Association).¹

The first Friends Group in Victoria was Friends of Organ Pipes, formed in 1972 by Jack Lyale (the park's first Caretaker/Ranger) and Don Marsh (a volunteer who had previously formed the Maribyrnong Valley Committee) to help with weed control and revegetation of this previously private land.

The success of their efforts in transforming Organ Pipes Park was noted and other Friends Groups were established. On becoming Director of National Parks in 1979, Don Saunders was instrumental in the establishment of many more. Geoff Durham was the major force within the VNPA in the development of the Friends Groups, both while he was President and subsequently as VNPA Coordinator of Activities. The chance to help weed, revegetate and otherwise rehabilitate areas of bush had popular appeal and the number of Friends Groups grew rapidly, to thirty in 1987 and to thirty-nine in 1990. One interesting group formed in the late 1980s was not place-based but worked to support the Flora and Fauna Guarantee legislation – the Friends of Flora and Fauna.

In 1983 several of the Friends Groups came together for the first of what became biennial conferences to discuss and coordinate their activities. Subsequently it was recognised that there would be great benefits in having a permanent umbrella body to coordinate and educate members of the groups, and to liaise with the National Parks Service. A Friends Committee of the VNPA was formed in 1986 with Geoff Durham as Convenor.

However, given the specific and extensive work required, the VNPA decided it would support turning the Committee into an independent organisation. In 2007 a constitution was approved establishing the Victorian Environmental Friends Network.

¹ Garden, D., & Victorian National Parks Association. (2012). *Conservation Journeys - A Short History of the VNPA*

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Friends Group & what do they do?

A Friends Group is a community of people who come together on a semi/regular basis to care for a local environment such as patch of bushland, coastline, riverbank or wetland. They organise activities such as planting days, weeding and maintenance, guided walks, presentations to community and education about their area depending upon the type of land and the resources available to the group. Friend Groups advocate and care deeply for their areas.

How do I find out what Friend Groups are in my area?

You can search on our [Friend Finder](#) database. You can also ask your local Council about upcoming environmental volunteering events or check out Parks Victoria's program called Parks Connect which also lists groups and activities you can join.

How do I join a Friends Group?

Each group is different in how they organise their membership. Look up their contact details on our [Friend Finder](#) and enquire about joining.

Can I start my own Friends Group?

Of course! Feel free to contact us to find out what is required to get your own group going to care for your local environment.

I have a disability that may restrict my ability to do some tasks, can I still join?

Most Friends Groups provide a range of activities for all abilities. There are a multitude of tasks to choose from - whether a variety of roles in the field e.g. signing people in, safety talks, wildlife or plant I.D, providing refreshments or all important roles in admin, marketing, advocacy or volunteer management. There is something for everyone.

I'm looking for volunteer opportunities to do with children, is there something for us?

Friends Groups are usually keen to involve our future custodians! Chat to your local Friends Group about what opportunities they offer or even share any ideas you or your family may have. If a child has a particular interest you could find a group that specialises in that area.

I don't have any time but would love to donate money. How can I do this?

Friends Groups welcome financial support to be able to keep doing their good work. Different groups will have different processes. Use our [Friends Finder](#) to find your local group, a group that inspires you or works on an issue close to your heart and offer them your support. It takes all forms of support to make a Friends Group tick.

Get in touch!



The Victorian Environment Friends Network is hosted by the Victorian National Parks Association, Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton 3053.



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