



## President's Report to the 2013 Annual General Meeting

9 December 2013

### The Year Past: July 2012 – June 2013

The past year has seen the close of a chapter in the life of the MCG.

- We wrapped up the **2011-13 CFOC** projects. This, as it turned out, was the last year of funding for our **Waterwatch** program, and of what was our short-lived **Biodiversity Monitoring** project, which came to be known as **Vegwatch**. We saw the completion of the **Sustainable Horse Management** project and the **Rabbit Control** project. We also saw, however, the shape of the next chapter: the things to come, with **Bioblitz** taking an early profile.
- Unfortunately we could not find sufficient funding for projects to retain our Project Officer, **Rachel Marks** beyond the Bioblitz and as it turned out Rachel was looking to move to Sydney, so with regret we have since farewelled Rachel.
- The **Molonglo Waterwatch** program continued to thrive under the enthusiastic guidance of Stephen Skinner. During the year the number of actively monitored sites increased from around 40 last year to around 45 during the year, hovering around 50 at year end. Since the end of the year and the decision not to fund Waterwatch by the ACT NRM Council, the focus of our Waterwatch coordinator, now rebadged as Catchment Officer, has been redirected to catchment health and on-ground work in grassy box woodland and natural temperate grassland. We are still waiting hopefully for the implementation of the Lake Burley Griffin Action Plan, which we expect to revitalise Waterwatch.
- We were able to follow up the successful **Horse Management on Small Properties** project with on-ground works and on-site advice to some of the landholders who attended the workshops. This model was very successful, so we applied to the NSW Environmental Trust for further funding to continue this work. Unfortunately the NSW Environmental Trust has altered the timing of its funding cycle, so even if successful this will not start until July 2014: an example of how our planning must not just look into the future but we must have a series of options available (Plans B, C and D!) to cope with all eventualities.
- The consultation with ACT Roads about realignment of Woolshed Creek associated with the development of the **Majura Parkway** has brought with it some interesting interactions with landholders, and Government agencies.
- We are very fortunate to have a keen Artists Society of Canberra to guide the *Along the Molonglo* Art Exhibition in the ACT with a willingness to try new approaches. For the first time in 2013 we saw the three catchment groups working together to support the exhibition, albeit with a less than satisfactory response from our first attempt at garnering entries from schools. Meanwhile, the Queanbeyan *Along the Molonglo* Art Exhibition maintains its momentum; this year we saw the stand-alone Molonglo Prize, judged by our Vice President, Karen Williams.
- Consideration of our continuing presence at **Floriade** in 2013 after hassles in 2012 with parking and a lower level of support from the organisers, which prompted questions about its value, was forestalled when ActewAGL withdrew support for the Look'n'Learn marquee amongst other things. However a successful presence at **Canberra Show**, which brought a far more targeted audience, made the pending loss of Floriade more palatable.

- The **Molonglo Bush on the Boundary Group** is now well settled, having established a trusted forum for discussions with Government and developers in the Molonglo Valley. Concerns about the Googong development, heightened after a one-in-twenty year rain event in January, saw the developers agree to the formation of a BoB group for Googong. The East Lake – Jerrabomberra development is the remaining one that warrants a BoB group.
- The **K2C project** funding is more certain and the restructure of its governance, which caused more than a few ripples a couple of years ago, I believe continues to raise eyebrows as it takes on projects in its own right. It will be interesting to see how much longer it remains a competitor with its own partners for scarce grant funds rather than bringing in new funds. This will be particularly interesting as new partners are taken on board while others may disappear with the establishment of the LLS.
- The review of the **Molonglo Catchment Strategy** nears a draft for wide consultation, thanks to the diligence and enthusiasm of Mel Hillery.
- Thanks also to Mel's enthusiasm, we have picked up delivery of **Land for Wildlife** in the Molonglo catchment.
- Collaboration on the Weed Spotter portal and mobile app could see long term gains in the war on weeds in the not too distant future.

## Group Objectives

The Group formed formally a little over 10 years ago, with a set of objectives. The Committee is mindful of these objectives and strives to address them. Because of the change in focus of main funding support, the opportunities to diverge from our objectives will be constant in the next few years and we need to be diligent in order to remain true to our objectives while addressing the objectives of our funders. We will probably need to be much more reliant on volunteers, rather than staff, to carry the flag at many of our public activities. The wheels of progress at times roll frustratingly slowly while in other respects we find ourselves on new ground.

The basic objects of the group are:

1. Provide an umbrella organisation for existing Landcare and other natural resource management (NRM) organisations in the Molonglo Catchment.

*2012-13 was a year of consolidation: our support for groups through the year was largely consistent with previous years. Although we did not see the establishment of more groups, the ground work for support for new groups in the Molonglo suburbs is oriented in that direction. Groups are seeing the value of maintaining Vegwatch and we see the value of maintaining support for it. How we do so will be a challenge.*

*Once again I feel obliged to mention that although the long-term sustainability of website maintenance is being addressed, it is regrettably all too slow. The glimmer of light remains visible at the end of the tunnel; the journey in the tunnel just seems to get slower.*

2. Facilitate the preparation of a community catchment strategy for the Molonglo Catchment, as an agreed framework between key stakeholders for regional delivery of NRM, consistent with the Murrumbidgee Catchment Blueprint, ACT NRM Plan and total catchment principles.

*The Molonglo Catchment Strategy is currently being reviewed, and that review process is perceived as an essential part of the Lake Burley Griffin Action Plan and support for its completion was taken up in the Parliamentary agreement between the Greens and the ALP.*

3. Promote a strengthened partnership between stakeholders in the Molonglo Catchment, to enhance capacity to address NRM issues in the Molonglo Catchment in a collaborative, coordinated and cost-effective manner.

*The group continues to be represented at a regional level through the Catchment and Landcare Association, the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordinating Committee and the Kosciuszko to Coast Partnership. The Molonglo BoB Group has served to further enhance capacity and establish collaborative partnerships and the Googong BoB Group will provide similar opportunities. We have been represented on the Murrumbidgee Landcare Association (MLi) for 10 years and in the coming year we may need to decide whether a similar commitment to the corresponding organisation in the new South East LLS region may make the commitment to MLi onerous or even superfluous. The Group is seen as a credible vehicle for NRM delivery as we continue to effectively deliver projects. However this reputation is at risk if we fail to deliver on time.*

4. Provide support to member groups with sub-catchment planning, strategic project development, funding bids, managing projects and to develop cross-sectoral partnerships and corporate support for projects.

*We provided support to the Majura Valley Landcare Group, Oaks Estate, Friends of Mt Majura, Burra Landcare, Captains Flat Landcare, Royalla Landcare, Friends of Black Mountain, Carwoola Landcare. Continuing engagement with Queanbeyan City Council and Murrumbidgee CMA continues to bring benefits to each organisation. Again, this reflects the enthusiasm and professionalism of our staff.*

5. Provide a structural link between ACT and NSW groups.

*Our representation on the CLA and UMCCC helps this process on a regional scale, and at our catchment scale we have been able to encourage greater participation in catchment activities.*

6. Provide a central point of contact for the broad community, including information dissemination.

*This function continues to operate satisfactorily within the ACT and the duplication of effort across the border is decreasing. The challenge is to raise the profile of the group and hence the issues of natural resource management. Having a shopfront in Queanbeyan certainly helps. However we continue to be stretched for space. The Lake Burley Griffin Action Plan implementation may offer an opportunity for some reinforcement of this objective.*

7. Employ and manage a Molonglo Catchment Coordinator to facilitate meeting the above objectives.

*The role of Coordinator for a community-based catchment group is a difficult one, with often conflicting demands on time and resources. Anna See has demonstrated that she is well-equipped to continue the very professional approach to catchment coordination as well as managing the office and me and my bright ideas.*

## **The Year Ahead**

As foreshadowed last year, the level of funding the ACT NRM Council's Regional Delivery for groups like MCG was diminished, but what was not clearly foreseen was that the focus available to us would be far less on the community capacity building and Waterwatch in particular, which we do so well, and more on on-ground works. So we find ourselves with a lower level of funding and seeking other funding to continue with the same level of community involvement beyond June 2013. One such potential source of funding remains the implementation of the Lake Burley Griffin Action Plan, but while our involvement in the implementation seems assured, the level of

involvement still remains unknown. In anticipation of this involvement we try valiantly to maintain the momentum of Waterwatch while not being funded to do so. Conversely, while not being funded to continue the Vegwatch program, we are now being *asked* to do so, as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation of the ACT NRM Council's Regional Delivery.

Once again, the year ahead promises to be a very interesting one. As already indicated, the Lake Burley Griffin Action Plan implementation offers a potential complementary funding stream to the Caring for Our Country through the ACT NRM Council. Once again, we have an application for a large weed management project on the Molonglo River at Captains Flat pending.

At the same time, urban growth within our catchment will become a major issue for the next few years with Molonglo Valley development and East Lake Urban Renewal in the ACT and Googong and Tralee in NSW. These developments are likely to seriously challenge our resources if we do not plan adequately. At the same time they present an enormous opportunity that could enable us to expand our horizons.

The Group continues to suffer because of inadequate community participation in the committee to share the load; I believe that we must be a little more evangelical in attracting increased membership, with an eye on the future. It was encouraging, therefore, to have an enthusiastic Regional Landcare Facilitator who steered us, and other groups, into making nominations for the biannual Regional Landcare Awards as a way of celebrating the amazing work done by volunteers and support staff. We were proud to nominate (or organise another to nominate) Stephen Skinner for the Coordinator Award, John Bruggeman for the Quiet Achiever Award, and both ACTEW Source Water Protection Program and Rob Thorman from LDA for the Landcare Partnerships. But we need to continue to tell the stories of people and organisations like these throughout the year and not just at the Landcare Awards. Our communications plan awaits ...

## Thanks

When I look back on my remarks last year, I wonder at how little some things have changed and why. In closing, I would once again like to record my gratitude for the assistance of the committee throughout the year, in preparing, commenting on and refining our submissions, communications, and processes. Vice-President, **Karen Williams** has offered well-reasoned insights, guidance and the opportunity to follow new ideas and I am grateful for our discussions. We gratefully accept **Jim Arnold's** and **Don Fraser's** suggestions, while **Linda Beveridge** and **Carol Billet** from Friends of Black Mountain have helped keep us focussed on the main game: supporting our membership. Carol's work as Secretary has been laudable, yet for some reason, she keeps apologising when she forwards an initial draft of the minutes.

I again acknowledge the frank and fearless advice that our Coordinators, **Anna See** and **Stephen Skinner** have provided, while **Rachel Marks**, **Mel Hillery**, and **Ro McFarlane** have stepped up when called upon and their advice and dedication is much appreciated. **Tom Baker's** tireless work with *Along the Molonglo* and on the K2C committee cannot be matched.

I started this report with a comment that this year sees the close of a chapter in the history of the MCG. The resignation of our foundation **Treasurer, Maryke Booth**, whose business has provided bookkeeping support for 10 years, is understandable and we gratefully acknowledge the benefit she has provided to the organisation. **John Bruggeman** has also been on the Executive Committee since the start and was Secretary for 6 years from 2007 until the end of 2012. He has continued to experience a difficult year so I am grateful that he has been able to stay on the committee for as long as he has and pleased that he has now resolved a lot of his difficulties. We wish him well for the next stage of his life albeit in a place too far away for us to be able to continue to enjoy his contributions to the committee.

Lynton Bond  
9 December 2013