

# Brisbane Ranges Landcare Group

# Newsletter



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Visit our website for latest news: http://brlg.org.au

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Welcome to our April newsletter. This one is being sent out after the April members meeting instead of usually being sent out beforehand. The purpose of the delay is to provide our members with the information provided at our last meeting about the solar installation proposed for Balliang. For our members that couldn't attend the presentation, catch up on the news below.

# April members meeting - Balliang Solar Installation

At the Brisbane Ranges Landcare Group April meeting, we heard from **Elgin Energy** (the largest privately owned solar developer in the UK) who are planning an initial 300MW solar farm over 1200 acres along Little Ripley Road in Balliang. Elgin energy is a utility scale solar and storage developer with around 45 staff. Elgin energy delivered 21 solar projects totalling 230MW since 2009, committed to multiple projects



in Australia, supported by headquarters in Dublin.

The following information about the proposal was provided by Elgin Energy to the group on the night.

Elgin Energy focuses on markets where there are strong fundamentals and opportunities for long-term growth. The Australian fundamentals include:

- High Solar radiation Australia has the highest solar radiation of any continent.
- Coal retirement NSW and VIC are predominantly powered by an ageing fleet of coal power stations that need to be replaced over the next 20 years by cheaper and cleaner technology.
- Increasing political support NSW is implementing the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap to 2030. Victoria has a 40% renewable target by 2025. Both states aim to halve emissions by 2030
- Corporate and government uptake large corporations and governments are committing to purchasing renewable energy for the long-term through power purchase agreements (PPA). Examples include Facebook, Google, Telstra, Mars, Unilever, Carlton United Breweries, University of Queensland and State Government Departments and Council alliances.
- Technology costs Solar PV and battery technology prices continue to reduce dramatically. Reduction in equipment costs results in cheaper power prices

# The proposal

Elgin Energy is proposing a solar farm and battery energy storage system (BESS). If approved, the facility will include:

- 300MWp (approx.) capacity of a solar photovoltaic (PV) (the conversion of light into electricity) using single axis tracking solar technology
- A battery energy storage system (BESS) with around 150-250 MW capacity.
- Footprint of approximately 480Ha.



### The site

Located at 1145-1215 Little River-Ripley Road, Little River, Victoria

- Total site area 735 hectares
- Currently used for agriculture, including sheep grazing and cropping
- In Greater Geelong City Council area
- 34km north of Geelong City Centre
- 11.5km north-west of Little River Town Centre.



# **Project benefits**

Employment opportunities for both

local and regional businesses during construction and operation. Creation of around 150 jobs during construction (with considerably more during peak) and approx. 3 during operation. Contributing to the Victorian Government renewable energy targets. Reduced greenhouse

gas emissions and generate enough clean electricity to power around 98,000 homes.

#### Other benefits of a solar farm

Fast to install compared to other energy plants Clean, quiet, and visually unobtrusive Zero pollution or emissions Creates clean, renewable energy that will support the health of future generations. Supports national energy independence Ability maintain sheep grazing once operational.

# It will include ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) modules (panels), like those installed on rooftops around Australia.

# Caring for the environment

Elgin are talking to the community now to ensure plans consider all physical/environmental and cultural features of the site and its surroundings.

- The site is suitable for solar (it's generally flat and contains considerable area of clear land).
- It can connect with the grid.
- It has excellent direct sun light (solar irradiance) to support the proposal.
- Careful assessment and surveys of the environmental sensitives of the site form part of the site layout and planning application preparation process.



# **Cultural significance**

Elgin are working closely with Wadawurrang Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to prepare a Cultural Heritage Management Plan The plan will identify measures to mitigate impacts to tangible and nontangible cultural heritage elements of the site.



# **Managing community impacts**

Elgin are committed to minimising the impact on the community. During construction, care will be taken to restrict and limit noise and traffic impacts. Other safety measures include safety barriers and maintaining a clean worksite. During operation, as part of the proposal, we are assessing impacts on the area as a result of the solar farm. These assessments will measure community impact, and include the measurement of:

- the sunlight's reflection from the solar panels
- · what the facility will look like in the area.

#### Traffic and access

All access to and from the site will be via Little River-Ripley Road.

- Two three entry ways will be located to the north on Little River-Ripley Road
- One entry way will be located to the south on Little River-Ripley Road



# **Community sharing initiatives**

Elgin Energy are creating a benefit-sharing program to support the contribution to the local area of Little River. To help Elgin Energy capture community feedback and identify gaps in any resources in the community, they have prepared a community survey. Elgin is in the process of publishing the benefit sharing website and anticipate it will go live shortly. Once published, scan the QR code to the right for the survey.



Elgin Energy are also interested in initiating an additional phase of their project, if suitable properties can be identified.

For more information, attend the community information session times and venues listed below and see the Elgin Energy info page attached along with this newsletter.



#### Proposed Barwon Solar Farm – community information drop-in sessions

Join us at Little River Mechanics Institute Hall (8 Rothwell Rd, Little River) for a community information drop-in session to learn more about the proposal, ask questions, and provide feedback to the project team.

There is no formal presentation, so visit at a time that suits you.

#### Session options – feel free to drop in between any of the times:

- Wednesday, 25 May 2022 (2pm 5pm)
- Thursday, 26 May 2022 (5pm 8pm).

**What it's about:** Elgin Energy is proposing to deliver a solar farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) at 1145-1215 Little River-Ripley Road, Little River. This involves preparing a Planning Report to submit to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

Elgin Energy is committed to keeping the community informed at each stage of the project from planning to construction. If you have any questions about the proposal, please email <a href="mailto:engagement@urbis.com.au">engagement@urbis.com.au</a>

# Nesting box Workshop

Our Landcare group hosted a nesting box workshop on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> of March at the Balliang Hall. All participants listened eagerly to the talk and demonstration by Miles Geldard, and then selected a nesting box of choice to construct,



and take home to install. Miles Geldard has been making habitat boxes for native wildlife for



nearly 20 years. Miles lives amongst the box ironbark forests in Castlemaine, Victoria. It's generally understood that species decline is primarily driven by habitat loss. Installation of a nest box immediately helps our native fauna by giving them somewhere to live. Miles' Wildlife Nestboxes are designed from peer reviewed ecological research and extensive field trials. They are built to last and constructed from quality local sustainable materials. Also included, a revolutionary 'bee treatment' that prevents



swarms of European bees from invading your nest box. This bee treatment is fully integrated, chemical free, maintenance free and last forever.

What we learnt from the nesting box workshop is that ideally, our native creatures prefer the comfy confines of hollow bearing trees, which are typically only found in trees exceeding 100 years of age. Larger hollows needed for our larger furry and feathered friends developing in much older trees. Hollows are essential for birds and small animals to breed.

There is a lot more to it than we ever realised. It is near impossible to replicate a 100 year old tree hollow, so the research and testing gone into the development of these nesting boxes is invaluable. Also, the importance of positioning the nesting box to protect our furry friends from weather and the scorching sun was also a great lesson for all in attendance.

The nesting boxes constructed on the day by attendees were suitable for the following:

- Sugar glider/Brushtail phascogate/Antechinus
- Ringtail possum
- Small Parrots such as lorikeets and budgerigars
- Medium Parrots such as eastern Rosella
- Large parrots, such as crimson rosella, rainbow lorikeet or gang

Some feedback from participants included, "We really enjoyed the workshop. I intend encouraging the



Barrabool Hills Landcare group to hold a workshop in the future. The workshop was very impressive. Thanks for organising it Robert." Thanks again Judy for letting us know your experience of the workshop. Hopefully in future newsletters we will be able to bring some good news and photos of



residents taking up our local nesting boxes.



Nest boxes can be delivered and installed on your property or posted to you with detailed instructions on how to install and monitor them yourself. Pick up is also available – call Miles on 0427591269, and/or check out his website: *Wildlife Nest Boxes* 

The images of within this article were sent from those that attended, showing their painted besting boxes installed in position. Hopefully we can bring you photos of happy inhabitants at one of our future newsletters.

# Moorabool Koala Count - needs your help!

Just following up from the Moorabool Koala Count mentioned in our last newsletter.

This was a partnership project with the Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group, the CSIRO and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners. CSIRO provided training, helped with a number of transect monitoring surveys and performed 30ha of thermal drone surveys just north of Gordon. In addition a number of citizen scientists checked their local area and recorded sightings



of koalas. For example, in our local area we found 9 different koalas near Staughton Vale Rd and Anakie Gorge.

The MCLG has stayed in touch with the CSIRO and are looking to expand the program throughout the catchment area and are looking for partners to continue surveys.

What this would involve is receiving training on how to perform transect surveys and record information correctly, and being able to perform a survey twice a year.

The survey itself is only a 500m or so walk with a partner and recording information as you go. The survey area does not need to contain Koalas, information about where Koalas are not is just as valuable to have. It can be on public land, or your own backyard, every bit of information is valuable. It would be great to check some areas where we have been planting trees.

Contact Bart on 0401 925 886 if you are interested or have any gueries.

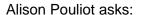


# Fungi in focus

Like Brisbane Ranges, the Surf Coast is home to myriad fungi. With their peculiar forms and amazing colours.

3 Mushie workshops have been formed as part of 'The small things in the big picture' a successful application in the Victorian Landcare Grants – 2021, coordinated by Torquay and District Landcare Group.

 Marvellous Mushrooms – 10am Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June @ Coastal Forest Lodge, Forest Road, Bellbrae. Cost \$30. Contact: L Evans - <u>laevans1@bigpond.com</u>



- What are all those fungi doing out there in the landscape?
- How do they help ecosystems function?
- How do we differentiate the desirable from the deadly?

To register for this event, click on the following link:

<u>Marvellous Mushrooms — Victorian Landcare Gateway (landcarevic.org.au)</u>

2. Fungi in Focus – 10am Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June @ Coastal Forest Lodge, Forest Road, Bellbrae

Cost \$30 Contact: Lesley Evans. laevans1@bigpond.com

This workshop introduces participants to the diversity, ecology and curiosities of the Kingdom Fungi, specific to fungi found in the region but also within wider Australian and global contexts. It includes an interactive session on the basics of fungus identification where participants will get to handle, examine and identify various fungi, followed by an exciting foray to search for species of interest.

To register for this event, click on the following link:

<u>Fungi in Focus — Victorian Landcare Gateway (landcarevic.org.au)</u>





**3.Mushroom Rendezvous** – 10am Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June @Coastal Forest Lodge, Forest Road Bellbrae. Cost \$10. Contact Lesley Evans – <a href="mailto:laevans1@bigpond.com">laevans1@bigpond.com</a>

Wander through the diverse habitat types of the Coastal Forest Lodge bushland and we'll explore and examine a great range of fungi. Alison Pouliot leads you on an exploration and examination of a great range of fungi. Participants will learn the basics of finding and identifying fungi and their associations with plants and animals. Don't forget to bring along your camera or magnifying glass.

To register for this event, click on the following link:

<u>Mushroom Rendezvous — Victorian Landcare</u>

Gateway (landcarevic.org.au)

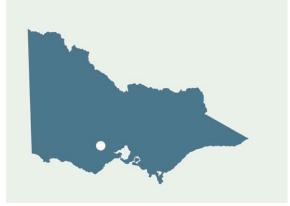
Morning tea and lunch included at each workshop. Each workshop has limited participants, so get in quick! Registrations are essential.

# eDNA testing for platypus in the Moorabool catchment

### Citizen scientists test local waterways

In May 2021 MCLG members undertook training in collecting water samples to be screened for platypus eDNA and went on to test the Moorabool River (east and west branches and at the point of bifurcation), Paddock Creek, and the Werribee River.





Platypus are a flagship species that indicate macro-invertebrate abundance, species diversity, water quality and vegetation quality.

The results were available a month after testing. Six out of the eighteen sample sites returned positive results, while trace amounts were detected at another four.

Positive detections occurred in the west branch of the Moorabool River and downstream from the point of bifurcation.

Partial detections in the east branch of the Moorabool River means platypus may be present, but in low abundance. These partial detections may also be a result of sample contamination

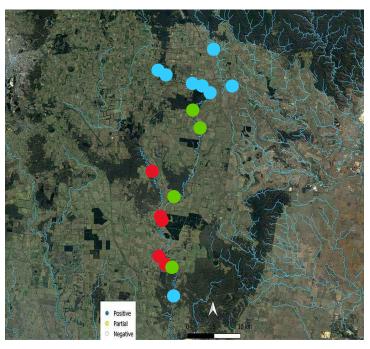


or dispersal of DNA from further upstream. Repeat sampling is recommended to confirm presence or absence at these sites.

MCLG members enthusiastically took on the role of citizen scientist and collaborated with others they had not met previously. They also got to visit parts of Moorabool catchment they had not previously seen.

Right: Results from eDNA sampling in the MCLG area. Red is positive detection for platypus, Green is partial and Blue is no-detection.

MCLG President, Julie Keating, said the day was inspiring. "The opportunity to participate in the eDNA data collection day reminded me of how much there is to do, how everyone can make a difference, and how important these things are. Connecting with the river and its wildlife this way with members of my community, and learning from experts, has inspired me to want to do more." Julie said.



#### Baseline established

With very little historical data, platypus population trajectory in the MCLG area has been hard to determine. We now have important baseline data from which we can continue to monitor and track local populations.

MCLG will now use this data to target revegetation projects in riparian areas with poor vegetation quality. Improving these areas can help expand and improve the health of platypus populations and all other biodiversity that depend on healthy waterways.

eDNA technology was used to test more than 2000 sites across Victoria from August-November 2021 as part of The Great Australian Platypus Search. The MCLG eDNA testing project was funded by the Corangamite CMA.

Jackson Cass is Landcare Coordinator for Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group.

For more information email moorabool.landcare@gmail.com

# Weed risk ratings

Risk ratings for environmental weeds in Victoria.

Risk ratings provide an indication of the level of threat posed by a weed. The <u>Managing</u> weeds: assess the risk guide is focused on the threat from weeds to biodiversity, particularly on public land.

Invasive plants present a serious and ongoing threat to Victoria's biodiversity. A 2022 updated advisory list of environmental weeds in Victoria is available listing over 1,800 plants. The information is being used with other data to allocate management resources more effectively. Its purpose is to



help public land and biodiversity managers with the relative risks posed by different environmental weeds and the relative urgency of managing them across Victoria's natural ecosystems.

The advisory list is available as a searchable and sortable spreadsheet along with a description of the objective 'expert system' for ranking environmental weed species with respect to management urgency.

https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/\_\_data/assets/excel\_doc/0027/563607/Advisory-list-of-environmental-weeds-in-Victoria\_2022.xlsx

Our Landcare group is on the hunt for a speaker at one of our next meetings, to discuss the identification and control of some of our more common weeds. We will keep you informed via this newsletter with information on future speakers.



# Serrated Tussock Field Day

Thank you to one of the members of our Landcare Group that pointed out that the following field day was advertised in the Moorabool Newspaper. But **get in quick as its on tomorrow!!** 

The Pentland Hills Landcare Group would like to invite you to their **Best Practise Management Field Day.** 

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May 10am to 2 pm Myrniong Hall - 6 Short Street, Myrniong.

Activities on the day include:

- Treatment demonstrations
- Pasteurised Grazing Management
- · Integrated control options; and
- Free lunch!

To be a part of this field day, contact Pentland Hills Landcare Group on: 0419 884 451

# A nature-based solution to landscape repair in the Barrabool Hills

This is a story about more than just biodiversity, but rather about harnessing the power of nature and community to solve environmental issues.

This story written by Kaye Rodden starts in 1990 when she and her husband and two daughters under two, purchased a new farm on the western outskirts of Geelong.

The farm had the carcass of an 1854 bluestone house perched on a narrow ridge that jutted into the Barwon River flood plain. There were picturesque

views of the river and its river flats and the Barrabool Hills on the skyline. There were also steep, rocky, non-arable and in some instances degraded, escarpments pock marked with vast ancient rabbit warrens which had exposed the infertile subsoil – an open invitation to opportunistic germination by every weed imaginable.

Their immediate priority was to fence the property into land classes so that those areas more vulnerable to over-grazing or not suitable for cultivation were managed differently. This was quickly superseded by an urgent need to find a way to manage an increasing infestation of an emerging weed in the district on the bare escarpments. In late spring, thousands of windborne serrated tussock seed heads were blown across the district from large infestations to the west.

The prevailing winds caused most of the seed to fall on the river escarpments and non-arable areas which were already degraded and difficult to access.

#### A community battles serrated tussock

This was not a problem to be solved by individual land managers. It demanded the entire community to rally and fight the weed together.

In 1995, the Barrabool Hills Landcare Group was formed. Despite serrated tussock being a Weed of National Significance, there was little funding or support. Each land manager needed to find a way to control the infestations with their own or pooled resources, always knowing though that the community had their back. It was in everyone's interest to succeed.

The treeless escarpment was sprayed by fixed wing aeroplane and helicopter, using the recommended chemical at that time. The spray's residual activity restricted germination of the serrated tussock seeds and every other grass species too. This left the area effectively devoid of any ground cover.

They decided to isolate the area and attempt to revegetate it with deep rooted native trees and shrubs, to repair and stabilise the soil. The theory, which was not common practice at the time, was that as the perennial plants grew, they would cover the bare soil and make it difficult for the serrated tussock to germinate and set seed, providing a long-term sustainable solution.

They also decided to create a living barrier for serrated tussock seed blowing in from the west by planting multiple rows of casuarina (Allocasuarina cunninghamiana) along the top of the escarpment. They took advice from their local nurseryman, Stephen Murphy, selected a range of local provenance and other indigenous species which they hoped would manage the extreme hot and dry



conditions. Stephen suggested that the plants be positioned in groups of five to aid cross pollination and hopefully regeneration.

Between 1997 and 2000 they roped in family, friends, and local TAFE students, picking their way between the rocks to plant and guard 13,000 seedlings across 20 hectares of slopes. The terrain was so steep it was sometimes difficult to stand up.

#### Nature begins to heal

There were good years and bad years – not unexpected as most of the slope faced north and had little organic matter in the topsoil. In 1998–1999, during the millennium drought, 70 per cent of the plants were lost and needed to be replanted the following year.

Right: Before: In 1997 the escarpment was denuded and infested with serrated tussock.



Over time most of the plants started to grow and drop leaves and branches. The water that had previously run off in sheets, began to slow and pool in the leaf litter. The organic matter in the soil increased providing good conditions for seeds from the native vegetation to germinate. Nature was healing the land.



They still need to clamber up and down the slopes once a year duckina under branches with backpack to spray the odd tussock seedling or other weeds that have germinated from seeds that have found their way through a gap in the canopy or have survived in the soil.

# Above: After: A thirty-year Landcare project has transformed Kaye and Brent Rodden's property.

Their once denuded landscape is now home to a rich variety of wildlife including echidnas, snakes, kangaroos, swamp wallabies and many bird species. A rabbit proof fence right around the escarpment and a rabbit management plan have been successful at rabbit control. With a burgeoning population of raptors, rabbits are now a threatened species in the area. In 2021, for the first time, a pair of wedge-tailed eagles nested in one of the trees we planted and guarded more than 20 years ago.



Kate reports that it has been exciting to see their neighbours and the broader Landcare community witness what they have achieved and follow suit. Increasingly degraded or rocky non-arable areas on local farms are being fenced off and planted with perennial trees and shrubs, providing a more biodiverse environment, helping to manage pasture and crop pests, and importantly, preventing soil erosion by keeping the water in the soil profile – in effect a nature-based solution to a very challenging problem. The landscape is now more resilient to changing climatic conditions and is just nicer to be in too!

The Rodden family are foundation members of Barrabool Hills Landcare Group. Kaye is currently on the executive of the group and also Deputy Chair of the Geelong Landcare Network.

For more information email barraboolhillslandcare@gmail.com

# Brisbane Ranges Landcare Calendar 2023!!!

Get your cameras at the ready for some fun and exciting new shots, or go through some of your older photos to find some of your favourites to add to the 2023 Brisbane Ranges Landcare Group calendar.

It's that time of year again for Landcare to collect photos from our local photographers to collate into a calendar of our picturesque surroundings for the 2023 calendar.

The challenge for our photographers this year is to get the best shot of a Kookaburra! The winning Kookaburra shot will be the feature for January 2023.



Don't feel restricted by the Kookaburra challenge, as we'd love as many fabulous photos for the other months of 2023. If you need any inspiration, consider something old (farm gates), agriculture (photos of harvest time), or weather (sunsets, storm clouds etc).

Happy shooting! Please forward your photos to Nina Ellis via email: fly2nina@gmail.com.

# In our Regular News......

# **Weeds Website**

Weeds Australia website is designed to connect you with knowledge to make informed decisions about managing invasive weeds within Australia. The site includes an extensive list of 398 weeds profiles to help you better identify, plan and manage your weed problem.

https://weeds.org.au/





# Landcare Resources

I want to know about	Here is a good place to start
Aboriginal cultural heritage	https://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/heritage/heritage-tools-and-
location mapping	publications/heritage-tools.html then select "online map tool"
Biodiversity mapping and	http://maps.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/viewer/?viewer=NatureKit
recording	http://natureshare.org.au/
	http://avh.chah.org.au/
Boxthorn	http://weeds.ala.org.au/WoNS/africanboxthorn/docs/African_boxthorn-
0	national best practice manual.pdf
Chilean needle grass	https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/publications/guideli
Forel most control	nes/wons/pubs/n-neesiana.pdf
Feral goat control	https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/feral-goat/
Fox control	https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/european-fox/
Gorse	https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/publications/guideli
Landara and a dis	nes/wons/pubs/u-europaeus.pdf
Landcare networks	Moorabool Landcare Network Geelong Landcare Network
Melbourne Water Stream	https://www.melbournewater.com.au/community-and-education/apply-
Frontage Grants	funding/stream-frontage-management-program
	http://www.mln.org.au/images/PDFS/rabbitactionguide.pdf
Rabbit management	
	https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/european-rabbit/
Serrated tussock	https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/publications/guideli
	nes/wons/pubs/n-trichotoma.pdf
Weeds - identification and	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds/a-z-
control	<u>of-weeds</u>
Weed status in Victoria	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-
	weeds/weeds/invasive-plant-classifications
	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/protecting-
	victoria-from-pest-animals-and-weeds/legislation-policy-and-permits/declared-
	noxious-weeds-and-pest-animals-in-victoria