

# Action Group and Project Leaders Reports

## October 24<sup>th</sup> 2020

### **Sustainable Homes**

Sue Barker

#### **This year**

In my last two annual reports I've reported on group member engagement. 2020 was a year of promise: with a grant for the Woodend Neighbourhood House Winter Energy Efficiency project from the Stronger Communities Program, we prepared to run working bees ... and called them off - multiple times! We'll need a big volunteer effort to complete works by the end of the year, once restrictions ease.

#### **Sustainable House Day**

Sustainable House Day ran virtually this year, providing the opportunity for visitors to "travel" more widely than in past years. Sustainable Homes' contribution this year was to work on awareness of our local Climate Zone (it's CZ 7, in case you missed it) and encourage people to visit homes from other Climate Zone 7 districts. We published a "treasure map" suggesting relevant aspects to investigate during virtual home visits and interaction with homeowners.

#### **Sustainable Living Festival**

We have a couple more activities in the pipeline for the SLF – stay tuned to the Festival site.

#### **Public Enquiries**

We fielded a range of enquiries from the public on sustainable housing topics between June and August, including requests for information about where to find sustainable properties advertised, advice on renovations, information about local builders and other suppliers.

#### **New Projects**

Sustainable Homes assisted the Renewable Energy Action Group in putting together an application for Council funding of a Community Energy Awareness program. The application was successful and REAG is leading the project delivery.

# Healthy Homes Project

James Mackenzie

## Background

The MRSG Healthy Homes Project aims to alleviate the many disadvantages suffered by low income families living in cold, substandard, housing by improving the overall energy efficiency of up to 15 homes in the Macedon Ranges.

A pilot study, conducted in the Macedon Ranges, demonstrated that a 30% reduction in energy usage is achievable by implementing a number of simple home improvements. The associated improvements in indoor temperatures also provided significant comfort and well-being benefits.

This project not only benefits individual households, but provides benefits to the broader community through improvements to the region's lower cost housing stock, as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions through lower energy consumption.

MRSG Healthy Homes Project uses a mixture of volunteer labour (for initial audits and minor works) and local tradesmen for more significant works, thus any financial support would be going directly to support local tradesmen and the purchase of materials from local hardware stores. Under the MRSG Healthy Homes model, significant improvements to the quality of life of low income households can be achieved for around \$4,000 per household.

## Project status

MRSG took over the management of the Healthy Homes Project (which was initiated by the Macedon Ranges Christian Business Men's Association) and a Project Charter was signed by both parties in March 2020. The project has four major components;

1. Training volunteer energy auditors
2. Seeking referrals from low income households
3. Seeking funding via grant applications
4. Undertaking home improvements

A training program for energy auditors has been written, and two grant applications have been submitted (one unsuccessful, one undecided). Letters of support have been sought from Federal MPs, and Lisa Chesters MP has offered seek federal funding on our behalf. The Victorian government (via DELWP) have also shown interest in the project and an initial meeting has been held.

The project currently holds over \$4,000 (from a grant received by the CBMA) and part of this is to be used to complete minor works on the two pilot project homes.

As COVID restrictions ease, the project will actively commence seeking referrals, training volunteers, and undertaking home improvement works prior to the commencement of the 2021 winter season.

# **Veg Action**

Claire Rowland

Veg Action has had a crazy busy year. Our focus has primarily been on promoting consumption of more sustainable food choices; namely plant rich and plant-based foods. We have worked hard to build a community interested in increasing their vegetable consumption, to build a mechanism for advice/support and recipe exchange, and to promote the visibility of plant based food options in the Ranges. In 2019 we organised veg pot lucks, veg nights out, market stalls and catering events. We started a facebook page “Eat more veg, Macedon Ranges”, which currently has 545 members and features regular posts including a weekly test recipe, a focus vegetable for the week and ‘what’s for dinner’ on Meat Free Monday. The inaugural Winter Veg Recipe Challenge, held mid-lockdown and judged by local “celebrities” Jed café owner Jackie Goodyear, our mayor, Janet Pearce, and MRSG’s President, David Gormley-O’Brien was a great success, with close competition for the great prizes provided by the MRSG market team (THANK YOU). If you missed the live feed on facebook, check out the video here: <https://youtu.be/>.

Our most recent and exciting news is that Veg Action has expanded to include the Woodend permaculture garden and the Crop swap group (you can see their reports below). Our intention is to bridge the gaps between the skills/networks for growing, cooking and sharing food to support planetary health and community resilience. The first child of this union is a garden to table blog series on spring vegetables which you can see here: <https://mrsg.org.au/blog>

## **Woodend Produce Exchange**

The Woodend Produce Exchange has had a strange year, as has everyone! There is a table set up the first Saturday of each month at the Woodend Farmers Markets and its lots of people’s highlight at the market. In non-covid times, it’s very social with people coming to chat and exchange not only produce but stories, wisdom and a few laughs! In amongst all the craziness, we’ve only missed a couple of markets and there have still been some great swapping even with socially distancing and wearing masks. The swap continues to support local people and encourage conversation and learning around growing produce and sharing the excess.

## **Woodend Permaculture Garden**

The Woodend Permaculture Garden focussed on garden protein (not slugs) in 2019-2020; we grew chia, millet, beans, lentils and chickpeas. We had enormous competition in the harvest of them though and now we are armed with some insights into growing such a range of vegetable proteins. Since the end of last season our garden has endured flood and slugs but has a plan for delicious dinners in the Summer and Autumn seasons.

## Sustainable Malmsbury

Kathryn Allen

Sustainable Malmsbury has strengthened during this challenging year, with a focus on building our community connections and resilience.

We received a Council grant to run a series of up-skilling workshops. Our fermentation workshop with Meg Ulman in February 2020 was a great success. Our other workshops (sourdough bread making, cheese-making, edible weeds and soap and beeswax wraps) quickly sold-out but were postponed due to COVID-19.

We facilitated the Malmsbury Community COVID-19 Support Group in March 2020 to co-ordinate volunteers to help with deliveries and supporting locals who were isolating. Since July 2020, a small group of volunteers have been sewing gorgeous fabric masks for the community and raising money for the Malmsbury CFA and Kyneton Caring Community Foodbank. At last count, this project had raised over \$2000!

As part of our Energy Efficiency Initiative supported by a Council grant, we helped Malmsbury Primary School to raise awareness about energy efficiency and installed energy monitoring and energy efficiency retrofits, reducing their electricity use and emissions by one third. We trained volunteers to provide home energy audits, and look forward to resuming these once restrictions are lifted. We also successfully nominated the Malmsbury CFA for a Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance and Bank Australia grant to install solar PV and battery, reducing their emissions and providing back-up power and a community hub during increasingly frequent blackouts.

We have continued to enjoy our monthly Community Produce Swaps at the Malmsbury Village Farmers Market when restrictions have allowed them, and have recently added a Terracycle recycling station. We now have a monthly newsletter and a Facebook Page to let the community know about local sustainability events and projects.

Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers and to MRSG for your support. If you would like to be involved or have any ideas or contacts to help with any of our projects, please email us at [sustainable-malmsbury@mrsg.org.au](mailto:sustainable-malmsbury@mrsg.org.au)



L-R: David Perry and Kathryn Allen, Sustainable Malmsbury, David Gormley-O'Brien, President, Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group, Linda Krive, Malmsbury CFA, Tony Stephens, Malmsbury Fire Brigade Captain, Rob Law, Executive Officer, Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance. Photo: Carmen Bunting Photography



Fermentation workshop with Meg Ulman in the Malmsbury Town Hall. Photo Credit: Eve Archbold

# Waste Action Group

Lisa Richards

Remember January? That was when the first wave of FOGO green bins appeared in driveways around the Macedon Ranges. Although there are parts of the Shire that will not receive green bins for another year, the successful move to fortnightly landfill collection and weekly organics has been a welcome improvement to household waste management in our region.

The Waste Group began the year by excited about opportunities and events such as the planned Whole Town Garage Sale and Get it Sorted Council-run waste event.

Then, in early March events were cancelled like falling dominoes.

The first months of the pandemic were thoroughly disruptive to normal life and the Waste Group took a break from formal meetings, although we stayed in contact via email and phone. In May a decision was made to continue with our Terracycle waste collection as far as possible with the unit at Woodend Library. The Waste Action Group would like to extend deep gratitude to Lulu Cockram and her incredible team at Woodend Library, who have been incredibly supportive of this enterprise, particularly during such a stressful time.

Some nice Terracycle stats:

We have collected

3381	L'Or and Moccona coffee pods
617	Nestle Dolce Gusto coffee pods
277	Units of beauty waste
1010	units of contact lens waste
2131	units of dental waste
9714	bread tags

And about a bazillion Nespresso coffee pods.

We have earned \$80 worth of Terracycle points to be redeemed towards a not-for-profit of our choosing.

Unfortunately, we made the choice to stop collecting coffee pods this year, as we have been receiving far more than we can reasonably manage. During the brief lull between lockdown periods there was some significant dumping of pods at the library. As there are other options for pod-users, the group has decided to move away from this problematic waste stream.

The big success story of 2020: The Wash Against Waste Trailer

Our highlight of an otherwise challenging year has been the completion of the Wash Against Waste Trailer. Peter Lane took up the vanguard with this project and with relentless passion and commitment, steered it to an unimagined level of success.

The original plan was to retrofit an existing old and rusted trailer. What MRSG now has is a brand-new, purpose built and custom designed state of the art vehicle. We are simply thrilled with the results of Peter's stewardship. Chris Matheson's skills and talent as a welder and construction guru have delivered something both beautiful and functional. Enormous thanks to both of you.

Thanks also to the Operations and Resource Recovery team at Council, particularly Monique Matthews who project managed from Council's side. She and Peter spent many hours picking over budgets and specifications in order to deliver this fantastic result.

The trailer is equipped to cater for festivals and events of several thousand. It can fully sterilize all crockery and cutlery, so as soon as we are able to gather in numbers again, the trailer can be utilised safely to ensure events in the Macedon Ranges are waste-free.

In other news, the group has remained active on social media with a campaign around "Can I recycle this?" and "Why can't I recycle this?" topics. The MRSG Waste Action Group on Facebook now has 137 members and is reasonably active as a place for the community to ask questions around waste and recycling issues.

Lastly, we have a change of leadership in the Waste Action Team. Joslin Moore will be stepping into the Group Leader role. We welcome Jos and her fresh insights, clear thinking and excellent leadership to take the group to new endeavours in 2021. Lisa Richards will remain part of the team. The Leadership Team overall are tight-knit and committed to the Waste Action Group, this year having proved the importance of connection through shared values and experience.

Final thanks go to David Gormley O'Brien for his constant and reliable Presidential support. We made it through a heck of a year!

## **Farmers' Market**

Robert Bruhn

This year saw us react to Covid-19, but we have not missed a beat. Thank you to AG members, volunteers and patrons who made it possible. Also a great thank you to our market Manager Katherine for being a rock through the pandemic response. We will miss you when you leave. Yes, that is right; Katherine's last market will be December 2020. Say goodbye to Katherine at the market. Look out for a job add for a new market manager soon.

There have been some changes to the AG and our volunteers too. A pandemic split the group, but new faces have taken over where the old faces left big shoes to fill. Old faces are more than welcome back when you feel safe to participate, and new faces are welcome to stay because you do such a fantastic job.

We are coming to the end of the proof of concept of Farmers' Market Online. We have the full support of MRSG committee and are keen to continue. At the time of writing, we had sent \$9,896.06 to 16 different farmers. We have built a strong following on Facebook with 319 followers, and on Instagram, we have 443 followers. All without using any money on marketing.

Upcoming projects are to hire a new market manager and start working closely with the other Macedon Ranges markets.



## **Woodend Bee-Friendly Society**

Sam Rixon

2020 has been an un-beelievable year! We started the year with a buzz with a new and improved newsletter, and a bee-ginner beekeeping course in March, just when COVID was becoming big news. And that put a stop to our regular hive of activity! We took advantage of the downtime to order another batch of exclusive Woodend Bee-Friendly Society triple layered branded bee suits and our 2020 edition hoodie. With the burst of Spring we have re-started our meetings via Zoom with over 40 members dialling in each time. We are improving our digital presence to increase accessibility for our members. We are in the thick of swarm season with club members travelling all over the Macedon Ranges giving new homes to wayward bee colonies. Through our merchandise, meetings and swarm registry, we have helped to drive MRSG membership numbers. We continue to be a strong and proud action group of the MRSG and advocate for responsible bee keeping, planting for both native and honeybees and bee awareness within the community.

# Renewable Energy

Bruce Mildenhall

## Summary of Projects/Activities

- Hybrid Energy Park. Assisted by Mary-Anne Thomas MP, work continued on finding a path through the land access impasse. The proposed project remains viable and capable of powering the domestic electricity consumption of the Shire.
- Community Solar Project. With the help of David Gormley-O'Brien and Ralf Thesing, the technical and contractual issues have been resolved and a cash flow to the Macedon Ranges Renewable Energy fund resumed.
- Residential Solar Connections to the Grid. To overcome restrictions imposed by Powercor on exports from residential solar systems to the grid, REAG members have liaised with Powercor to find a solution. Powercor has agreed to partner REAG in a pilot project to investigate the grid capacity in a selected Woodend neighbourhood.
- Assistance to Community Organisations.
  - Woodend Neighbourhood House. Following a 2018 feasibility analysis by REAG members, agreement has been reached to install a 10kw solar system with the assistance of a \$6,400 interest free loan from the Renewable Energy Fund and a \$5,000 grant from MASH
  - Malmsbury CFA. REAG members assisted the Sustainable Malmsbury's successful project of a solar and battery system for the Malmsbury CFA Station
  - Lancefield Mechanic's Institute. A feasibility study by REAG members has seen the lodgment of a strong application for a 10kw solar array under the DELWP's funding program.
- Household Sustainability. REAG has received a grant of \$5,500 from Macedon Ranges Shire to collect, make available and set up a community engagement program for household energy information for Shire residents during the 2020/21 year.
- ZNet and Cool Changes. Inspired by Hepburn Shire, REAG members have been active to advocate for a Zero Net Emissions project as a major strategy coming out of the Macedon Ranges Shire's community consultations for a community led climate change initiative for Woodend.
- Committed members. These projects and more have been made possible through tireless efforts of Ralf Thesing, Shane Richardson, Ben Cumming, Jan Corigliano, Annabel Meagher, Shannon McAllister, Barney Hearnden, Pete Walsh, Karl Kny, Henry Laas, Al Reid, David Gormley-O'Brien, Sue Barker and Bruce Mildenhall

MRS  
Action Group Report  
AGM 3 - 4.15pm  
25 October 2020

## Transport Action Group - TAG



This year has seen massive changes in the way we move around and engage with our surroundings. Seemingly unfathomable only last year, now no longer are many of us commuting to Melbourne daily on the PT system and indeed many are not commuting at all. Working from home has become both necessary and popular. We have seen the rise of the BMX bandits through our townships as kids return to an 80s type lifestyle of finding their own fun building cubbies in the forest and along the creeks as computers reach saturation point during the homeschool zoom sessions. All walking/cycling paths are super busy. People are strip shopping locally and taking the time to cycle in. There are examples all over the world of roads closing to cars and opening up pedestrians, cyclists and cafes and pubs spilling on to the streets. There will no doubt be pressure locally for our new Councillors to consider the same.

The TAG Team were out an about in Woodend in January this year trying to determine what infrastructure improvement option were most popular with the public. Turns out ALL options were popular! We knew this as the Woodend Structure Plan listed active transport as the major community priority back in 2014. Options included Safe routes to schools with crossing points, lower speeds, a redesign of the Coles intersection and a renewed look at the Masterplan for High Street creating areas were people were prioritised over cars and parking.

TAG team will continues to been focussing on getting safe infrastructure for walking and cycling being a great way to keep fit, connect to our community and environment and a way to drastically reduce our emissions. Please join us.



**‘Giving back the streets’ - A plan to de-pave 800km of Sydney Roads**

*-Angus Thompson  
October 20, 2020  
Sydney Morning Herald*



**“Bikes key to lower travel emissions”**

*- Bicycle Network*



**“Empty roads, busy paths”**

*- Department of Transport  
Victorian Government*



**“the school commute has gone off the rails - here’s how we fix it.”**

*-Transport Expert Alison  
Bunbury ABC News*



**‘A sign of the times: opening minds to open streets**

*- Bicycle Network*



**‘We are more likely to ride bikes if we can carry more on them’**

*-The Conversation*



## Kyneton Transition Hub KTH

October 2020

A major aim of KTH is to build resilience in the community and this has been needed more than ever during the pandemic and the recent wild bushfires.

During the latter part of 2019 KTH held successful stalls at the monthly Kyneton Farmer's Market and annual Agriculture Show promoting self-sufficiency in growing your own food, sustainable gardening and boosting community spirit. Sadly we have relinquished the Community Garden back to Kyneton High School and the Boomerang Bag group has retired after producing 4,500 bags over three years, a terrific effort.

All these activities ground to a halt in March this year but we have remained resilient – coping with lack of toilet paper, pasta and flour and making masks for family and friends – who would have thought. We have kept in touch with Zoom meetings or meeting face to face at Friday morning cuppa time at Social Foundry café. We help each other out.

What's new? A Retrosuburbia Bookclub was commenced 2 months ago. We meet on Zoom at 4pm every Sunday to discuss a chapter of Retrosuburbia the Downshifter's Guide to a Resilient Future by David Holmgren. It is an inspiring book and has lots of advice and help for becoming more resilient and self-sufficient – for beginners to the more experienced. Everyone is welcome to join us. For enquiries call 0419 874 735 or email [kynetonth@gmail.com](mailto:kynetonth@gmail.com)

More information is on our website [www.kynetontransitionhub.com](http://www.kynetontransitionhub.com) and these Facebook pages: Kyneton Transition Hub, Kyneton Permaculture at the Pub, Kyneton and District Town Square Co-op.

Stay safe everyone

From the KTH core group



*Working together to make our community stronger, happier and more resilient  
as we deal with the impacts of peak oil and climate change.*