

Contributing factors to BFS Landcare efforts to preserve and enhance Batesford's natural assets and 'sense of place' over 4 decades in a rural-residential/peri-urban context.

1. In the 1970's it was an enlightened decision by the Blackall family to distribute 200 native tree seedlings to the purchasers of each block in the first subdivision in west Batesford. They had a vision for this area to be an extension of the nearby environmental assets along the Moorabool River and the local Sanctuary and Dog Rocks. (Later in the 1990's the Ramsey/Honey subdivisions, following a trend and requirement by Council, added some intermittent street tree planting to their subdivisions).

2. In the 1980s a group of local residents lobbied to prevent a proposal for a grid subdivision in the privately owned and highly valued local environmental asset, the *Dog Rocks Flora and Fauna Sanctuary*, on the edge of the Moorabool River, then known as *Lilydale Sanctuary*. It was celebrated nationally for its diverse native birdlife and other valuable flora and fauna. These objections resulted in a VCAT hearing, where the local objectors failed.

However, in time the Belcher Family chose to restore the land to its natural state. In the early 2000's they joined the increasingly active Batesford, Fyansford, Stonehaven Landcare, (BFS Landcare), and together with the Geelong Landcare Network organised significant rehabilitation of the property, employing on-ground working groups, and applying for and succeeding in attracting significant government grants to support the rehabilitation. In 2006 the Belchers arranged with *Trust for Nature* for a preservation covenant to be placed on the title. This was to ensure that future owners of the property would continue to manage the area for conservation, with a view to enhancing the natural state of the land. The *Dog Rocks Flora and Fauna Sanctuary Vegetation Assessment and Vegetation Management Plan* was later prepared by ecologist Mark Trengove in March 2013. The property was eventually sold to Edward and Amelia Roydhouse in 2015.

<https://www.bfslandcare.org/projects/drffs/>

3. In the late 1990s BFS Landcare and others lobbied successfully for the Honey Family to give over the *Dog Rocks Reserve* to *Trust for Nature* to conserve and manage as part of an offset in the subdivision permit. (South east of this Reserve across the road, Bill Honey the local farmer, owns a small but ecologically valuable Woodland which BFS Landcare hopes will one day be protected by Trust for Nature).

<https://trustfornature.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Dogs-Rocks-Reserve-Brochure-FINAL.pdf>

4. In the early 2000s BFS Landcare participated in objections to the Golden Plains Shire proposal to build a gas fired power station at Stonehaven on the south west edge of Batesford adjacent to the housing estate. This galvanised all the local residents and the wider community with meetings and protests over many months before taking our case to VCAT. Although we subsequently lost at VCAT, later the parent company ENRON collapsed in the US and fortunately the proposal was shelved.

5. In 2001 BFS Landcare had successful negotiations with the Golden Plains Shire for the rehabilitation of *Primrose Creek* which flows from west to east into the Moorabool River when running. (This waterway is interrupted and dammed upstream by various landowners). Planting started in 2002 and the corridor was named *Red Gum Reserve* because of the beautiful and ancient River Red Gums growing there. Eventually, in 2019 we were pleased to see the adoption of the Shire's *Red Gum Reserve 10 year Management Plan 2019 – 2029*.

<https://www.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Red%20Gum%20Reserve%20Management%20Plan%202019-2029.pdf>

6. In 2002 BFS Landcare successfully applied for a City of Greater Geelong *Adopt A Park* grant for restoration works to be applied to approximately 400 metres of Moorabool riverside land, (resulting from the 'Public Open Space' contribution required on subdivision of the land), including also the 200 metre stretch downhill from the Dog Rocks Road, providing access to the river. This gave rise to the *City of Greater Geelong Moorabool River Reserve Management Plan 2005*. Later in 2010 the *Vegetation and Habitat Assessment, and Vegetation Management Plan for the Moorabool River Reserve, Batesford, Victoria* was adopted. The Belcher Family had in the meantime negotiated a 99 year 'peppercorn rent' lease with CoGG creating a corridor along the *Dog Rocks Flora and Fauna Sanctuary's Moorabool River frontage* and extending the public open space along the River's edge.

This was the beginning of the restoration and lobbying which BFS Landcare, together with *PALM, (People for a Living Moorabool)*, conducted to improve and ensure the health of the Moorabool River and its preservation as a wildlife corridor into the future, while also allowing for public recreation paths/spaces for people to enjoy being in nature. <https://mooraboolriver.org/index.php/palm>

www.Moorabool-Environmental-Water-Man-Plan-FINAL-2016.pdf

<https://www.bfslandcare.org/pdf/2020-BFS-Landcare-Submission-on-Ecosystem-Degradation-in-Victoria.pdf>

Later to enable the protection of the *Moorabool River north of the Midland Highway* below the developing *Riverstone* housing development, lobbying continued to Golden Plains Shire Council in order to 'reclaim' from the developer a more appropriate and wider river corridor zone than had been set aside, in an effort to ensure the protection of the river and its surrounds, (the riparian zone), which ideally should be 200 metres and more. Concerns were also expressed about the provision of blocks for sale on the flood plain, having in mind previous inundations there and climate change issues, as well as the management of storm water and its potential effects on the quality of water in the river environment. These will possibly be ongoing issues in future.

Both Golden Plains Shire and City of Greater Geelong continue rehabilitation and protection of the Moorabool River Reserves in Batesford with BFS Landcare, while conducting planting sessions with schools and community and applying for grants to further develop these works and create passive recreation opportunities. In 2023 the *Shire of Golden Plains* released the *Moorabool River Masterplan* for the river zone north of the Midland Highway below the Riverstone housing estate.

https://www.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Moorabool_River_Reserve_Masterplan_Adopted_23-33.pdf

BFS Landcare works with *PALM* and *WTAOC (Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation)* and in 2024 was involved in research to address the issue of the quarry and the river downstream of Batesford in light of future development west of Geelong.

See <https://bfslandcare.org/pdf/Rehabilitating-Moorabool-Yaluk-Recommendations-Report.pdf>

The CoGG proposal for housing development in the Northern and Western Growth Areas of Greater Geelong has the potential to adversely impact the Moorabool River at Batesford. In 2024 *PALM* and *BFSLC, GFNC* were involved in meetings submitting comments and concerns about this proposal

which if not properly managed threatens grasslands and threatened fauna in the area. <https://northwestalliance.au/>

7. In 2017 BFS Landcare was part of the local *Batesford Highway Action Group* lobbying VicRoads the State Government and local Councils to prevent a 4 or 6 lane highway being constructed through Batesford. The Group instead proposed and documented the *Batesford Community Bypass 2018*, a route leaving the midland Highway at Gheringhap to the north west of Batesford and passing through vacant land to ultimately reconnect to the Ring Rd., by-passing Batesford's housing settlement and natural assets, while the Midland Highway remains a 2 lane country road. This proposal has been shelved but inevitably will return. There is little consideration in the 'planners' world for such disruptions to human communities or biodiversity corridors protecting flora and fauna, which stand in the way of the shortest possible route between A and B. In more recent times as traffic has increased *BFS Landcare has successfully lobbied Councils to reduce the speed limits on local roads to protect wildlife which live in the surrounding nature reserves or are moving across country.*

<https://www.bfslandcare.org/pdf/2019-BFS-Landcare-Response-to-CoGG-Amendment-C395.pdf>

8. *Community and School Engagement.* Over 25 years BFS Landcare, a core group of active participants and a larger supportive membership, have proactively engaged with locals and those further afield. For many years meeting at the Stonehaven Fire Station, inviting guest speakers to events, working successfully to protect, restore and manage environmental assets in the Batesford region with landowners and both City of Greater Geelong and Golden Plains Shire Councils, the Geelong Landcare Network. Landcare Victoria and other environmental and government organisations. We have worked with adult volunteer and community groups, scout groups, and school communities, family groups at hands-on working bees and nest box building workshops, conducted invasive species workshops and programs, while having a presence at the GPS Farmers Markets and facilitating regular educational programs to raise awareness in multi-generational groups of the value of our work to the larger community. This includes annual *National Tree Day and Schools Tree Day events with Planet Ark*, <https://treeday.planetark.org/> and over the past ten years *weekly school visits by Covenant College* to our reserves to further nature conservation works. We have also developed a website which is rich with information. www.bfslandcare.org

Memorandum prepared by Felicity Spear and Helen Percy, 2025.