

**South Gippsland Conservation Society
President's Report
2010**

2010 saw significant changes in the Society with the departure from Inverloch to Melbourne of life members John and Shirley Gunson. I for one miss John's always-considered responses to the various planning and conservation issues we are continually bombarded with. Pam Matheson joined us as our new education officer bringing with her some exciting new ideas for getting a new generation involved with conservation and environment issues. Those of you who have been into the meeting room at the BEC will notice some changes with some more exciting ones to come. Unfortunately health issues have kept Pam away for the last couple of months but she is on the mend and keen to get back into her role as soon as she is able.

With the departure of John the executive has co-opted Michelle Ward, Debbie Williams and Pam to join us at our monthly executive meetings. Michelle brings her expertise in education and has taken John's position on the SGEEI Committee. Debbie brings a wealth of experience from her previous life of involvement in planning and environment projects in Frankston. Pam brings her enthusiasm and innovation to the committee that will expand the Society's vital role in education.

2011 brings an ever-increasing basket of challenges of environmental degradation, loss of habitat and biodiversity through population growth, increased wealth and consumption of "stuff". At last measure, on a global scale humans are using 140% of the world's natural capital. That is, the ability of the natural world to recover from our ongoing exploitation of its ecosystems. Increased frequency and ferocity of extreme weather events, most likely exacerbated by climate change, is adding to the losses of biodiversity and habitat.

The world's leaders are noteworthy in the unremarkable leadership they display in never-ending spin, lack of action and mismanagement of taxpayers' money in addressing the issues. Here in Australia the mantra of our political leaders continues to be never-ending growth at the expense of our very fragile environment. Wherever you look there are major issues.

The failure of governments to address the very real environmental problems of water over-allocation, soil loss through salt inundation and vegetation removal in the Murray Darling basin defies any rational logic. Scientists have been telling us for decades that there would be a collapse of the eco-services and the environment if the issues were not addressed. Our politicians of both persuasions fail to recognise the implications of not addressing the issues and by their inaction are effectively writing off one of Australia's largest environmentally diverse regions and most important food bowls.

These failures can be seen more locally with the ongoing budget cuts for natural resource management programs (Landcare, CMAs, Parks Victoria, etc.).

On a more positive note at a local level there are many community-driven projects that look towards a more sustainable future. Some of these are:

- The Energy Innovation Co-operative started in 2009 and has just received state government funding that will allow for bulk purchase of affordable solar systems across Bass Coast, South Gippsland and Cardinia Shires. The project aims to install 500Kwatts of solar panels on homes and community buildings.
- There is a move to create a number of Transition Towns across the region that look towards creating local self-supporting, low-carbon communities. The townships of Foster, Loch and Wonthaggi have a number community groups interested in working to achieve this.
- There are a number of small growers within South Gippsland now selling locally sustainably-grown produce to reduce the food miles expended in providing fresh, in-season produce.
- The Society is actively involved in planning issues, re-vegetation projects and coastal-protection projects.

A number of the Society's members are involved in one or all of these enterprises that look towards a sustainable future and the Society will continue to support their efforts.

Locally-driven action appears to be the only way that our leadership and the big end of town will be dragged into actively working towards a future that will give your children and their children a viable future. It is up to all of us to work towards that goal.

Some of the major issues facing the Society are falling membership, lack of younger members (less than 45 years old), and the need for younger members (if we can find them) to take on active involvement in the many issues I have outlined above. Most of our townships have seen significant changes over the last few years with growth, changing demographics and significant numbers of sea/tree changers. Despite these changes there haven't been large numbers of locals join the society. In the next 12 months it would be great if every member could take on the challenge of signing up at least two new members (young *or* old).

One of our newer members, Catherine Eldridge, undertook to revamp our webpage over the past year, and it is a work in progress. She researched webpages extensively before commencing, and the result is a very professional website. If you haven't yet visited the site, please do so at www.sgcs.org.au and be impressed. Thanks Catherine for the many hours of work invested.

Many thanks also to Frank Hirst for his role as Newsletter Editor. He has done a great job, and we trust that everyone enjoys and is inspired by all the events and news that are reported therein. If you have something (anything!) that could be of interest to other members, please send it in (with or without photographs) to sgcs@dcsi.net.au or even by snail mail!

Special thanks to:

- John Gunson who has been the backbone of the society for many years.
- Carlene Cartledge for her heroic iron-fisted management of our highly successful shop.
- Laurel Nowland for her uncompromising level of administrative and multiple other duties.
- Cheryl Tyler and Cynthia Hensley for their assistance with keeping the shop under control.
- All the volunteers who work in the shop and make it the success it is.
- The Executive who have to continually put up with me being late for meetings and not doing anything on time.
- All those brave souls who go out weeding on a regular basis.

Lastly, thanks to our entire membership for their ongoing support and to everyone who participates in the various activities and functions of the society.

I look forward to seeing you on March 20th.

Dave Sutton - President