

## Executive Report Nerrena Landcare Group 2013/14

During the past year we have held two events. The first was held on Monday 9th September. We went on a trip to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne with the program including a specialised horticultural tour at 11.00am with the Garden's Australian orchid expert. The group subsidised the cost of the talk, and we hired a bus to take us to Cranbourne, which was driven by member Mike Vella. Leaving Leongatha at 9.00am and returning at 3.00pm the visit to the gardens was enjoyed by the 20 or so attendees. Visiting the orchid houses was a great experience, seeing how these plants are cultivated. With our 'orchid eyes' tuned in, the group was free to get some lunch and wander around the rest of the garden to see the plantings. On the way to the lookout, we saw several species of orchids in flower by the track. Some of us were also lucky enough to see some bandicoots.

Nerrena Landcare group was involved with a CFA initiative to increase disaster preparedness in rural communities.

Together with other Koonwarra community organisations, Kevin and Jill met in to discuss what we could do in the face of a major disaster.

After deciding that the most likely disaster to affect the area was wildfire, and that we would be subject to outside control during the event, the time we needed to be focussing on was the aftermath of the disaster.

Presentations to the community meetings convinced us that connected communities are more resilient and members cope and recover from adversity better than communities that lack that vital relationship.

Although Koonwarra is well served with community organisations, members of one group may not know members of another. The committee decided to hold an event where locals could meet one another and discuss how we could develop and reinforce our local identity and the value of this connection.

The Nerrena Landcare group had a vital role in this, becoming the auspicing organisation for the get together.

Over 60 people attended the event on November 15<sup>th</sup>. We gathered at the Koonwarra Hall meeting our neighbours and establishing and refreshing friendships. Sausages were sizzled on the CFA barbeque, and participants placed models of their homes on the CFA burn table laid out as a model of Koonwarra. The brand new fire truck was on display, and Captain Koala made an appearance which was a real hit with the many kids.

Harry Forrester acted as MC for the night and introduced local identity Ken Caithness who spoke about the history of the township followed by CFA brigade leaders Ross Considine, Wayne Walker and Peter Hanily who spoke about fire plans and how Koonwarra brigade can help people with their planning.

The model town of Koonwarra was sacrificed by fire to aid our understanding of how wildfire would impact our township. It was very clear that areas with leaf litter and on upwards slopes had much greater chance of burning. A salutary lesson in keeping the area around your home clear of litter.

The event was a hit with all attending. Locals who couldn't make it this year expressed hope that it could become an annual event. The Koonwarra community has a Facebook page as a result of this initiative. Any further community get-togethers will be announced through this medium.

We were planning to have a field day in March discussing controlled burning for fire control and bushland management. Unfortunately the CFA person who was running this project, Mike McStephens project funding ended at the end of the financial year, and he ran out of time to make this happen for us. We have been in contact with the new fire officer with responsibility for this area, Craig Dunshea and when he can he will organise this with the group.

Our next event will be during Landcare week, with a bike ride and property visits on Sept 6, starting from the Koonwarra farmers markets.