



Annual Report 2013-2014

President's Report by Ralf Thesing, President

We had another big year for MRSG – the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group. Many projects, ongoing initiatives and special events as you can see on the following pages. The highlights are

- our annual Sustainable Living Festival in February
- a Food Forum that we ran last September
- the monthly Woodend Farmers Market including the Produce Exchange
- Seasonal Garden Workshops in the Community Permaculture Garden
- the ongoing campaign for renewable energy, specifically a community owned wind farm
- C3 – our own carbon offset program for electricity usage and travel

We had a few great social events as well: The after-party for all Sustainable Living Festival volunteers at the Woodend Thai Restaurant and a wonderful end of year event at Ethic with a lot of members and friends. Together with the Trentham Sustainability Group we organised a dinner for World Environment Day.

There are so many people to thank, it's impossible not to miss anyone (my apologies): the committee members, the coordinators for different working groups or projects like Denise for the Garden Group, Krista for the garden sessions, Alastair for the Sustainable Living Festival, Nea for the Zero Waste challenge, Bee and Bruce for organising the Ride 4 Renewables event, Ruth for the food forum and MrVeg, Helen for the Produce Exchange, Alastair and Barry for the renewables campaign, Al and Peter for C3 and Sharon managing the Woodend Farmers Market. The immensely important background tasks like Libby looking after the Newsletters, Nea maintaining the Website, Peter & Terri managing the Membership renewals, Rob looking after our email account and membership database.

We also have a great new asset: Our own "undercroft" storage area. After losing the storage area under the Neighbourhood House, Keith Altmann managed to convince Council officers that we were allowed to create a new storage area under the Cobaw Hub. Robert Were and Alan Reid helped to construct it.

All of the achievements are only possible because of the numerous volunteers we can count on. You help at the Wooden Farmers Market, the sausage sizzle, in the permaculture garden, the big Sustainable Living Festival and many other events. I trust that each of you gets fulfilment from your contribution and that you have a lot of fun doing it.

We are organising an amazing cycling event "Ride 4 Renewables" on the 18th of October and we have chosen the 28th of February for the next Sustainable Living Festival, with the volunteer "after-party" on the 7th of March.

I'm looking forward to another great year of projects and events. And I rely on you to contribute your ideas, time and energy. Bad things happen when good people do nothing

Kind Regards,
Ralf

Group Reports

Woodend Community Permaculture Garden and Seasonal Garden Workshops by Krista Patterson-Majoor

It's been a year of friendship and sharing in the garden. A huge thanks to Denise and Rodney Green for bringing their vast experience into coordinating what is happening the garden. Our regular volunteers; Franca, Marg, Trish, Bec, Wendy, Krista and Penny, have been enjoying the friendship side of things (not to mention the produce). And over 100 participants have enjoyed the knowledge shared at the seasonal garden workshops (not to mention the morning tea). These 'sessions' have proved to be enormously popular; covering topics including involving kids in the garden, wicking beds, perennial plants, seed saving and preserving.

The Woodend Community Permaculture Garden is located behind the Neighbourhood House at 47 Forest St. It is a demonstration garden that is for all of the Woodend community - feel free to visit at any time to say hello to the chickens, check out what's growing, or read the information signs for some tips for your own garden. The gardening group meets on Friday mornings at 10am and always welcomes new faces. We work in the garden for an hour or so, harvest and share whatever produce is ready to take home, and often enjoy a cuppa after. If you'd like to know more, please contact Krista Patterson-Majoor on 0408 204 449 or kristafish@hotmail.com.

Community Climate Chest (C3) by Peter Hansford

C3 provides a means to offset your CO2 emissions whether they are caused by electricity usage, car or air travel. This is done through your local sustainability group (www.climatechest.org.au/host/mrsg) with the following advantages:

- you nominate a renewable energy project to direct your funds;
- all funds go back to the community and to renewable energy projects
- your payment is tax deductible
- led by a not for profit community group
- controlled by the community (Alternative Technology Australia or ATA); and
- you are supporting your community

In June of this year the MRSG committee decided to dedicate some marketing resources to our locally developed carbon offset product, Community Climate Chest or C3. As an early part of the strategy MRSG supported the attendance of Barry Mann and Peter Hansford at the Congress for Community Energy. The Congress was the single most important event for marketing C3 as it attracted 200 delegates from the east coast of Australia, interested in pursuing community energy projects. Through the establishment of a stall in the break out area Barry and Peter were able to engage many congress delegates. Substantial follow up efforts have enabled Blue Mountains Sustainability, and the Central Coast Sustainability Group to sign up and others such as BSG, MASG, Starfish Initiatives and the National Energy Efficiency Network to consider C3 seriously.

In addition to chasing up leads the marketing manager, Peter Hansford, has been creating posts and media releases for C3 and pursued an opportunity for C3 to be the preferred carbon offset product by the music industry. Discussions with Green Music Australia continue.

The considerable debate over the carbon tax, the future status of the RET and other clean energy initiatives is, according to many commentators, having an impact on the enthusiasm for individual action on climate change.

A review of the 6 month marketing trial for C3 is due by the end of August.

For more info see our website www.mrsgonline.org.au or go to www.climatechest.org.au/host/mrsg

Woodend Primary School's 'Here Comes the Sun' by Al Reid

Woodend Primary School's 'Here Comes the Sun' solar panel campaign got off to a flying start this year, with over \$9000 in community contributions received between Christmas 2013 and June 2014.

The school intends to install a 30kW array across several of its roofs - enough to offset its daytime electricity consumption by 85%. Simon Reid of BREAZE Energy Solutions in Ballarat was chosen by the school council as the preferred installer. Powercor have just approved grid connection, so the school plans to install the first 15kW of the solar array in late September.

MRSRG donated over \$1000 to the campaign in May, matching funds raised by the school at the Woodend Farmers Market community BBQ.

The Winter Solstice party fundraiser was attended by several MRSRG members, including the president Ralf Thesing who delivered an inspiring speech urging the community to get on board because 'there's no point waiting for any level of government to take the lead!' Following the party, many parents and businesses were inspired to become solar sponsors by donating at least \$275 - i.e. the cost of one solar panel.

The total array will have 120 panels and the \$10,000 per year that the school saves on electricity bills over the next 30 years will be invested in teaching and school infrastructure, rather than going to the electricity retailer.

So please chip in, take direct action on climate change and contribute to a lasting legacy for our school and community. Donors will be acknowledged on a permanent sponsor board at the school. Any amount will be gratefully received and donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

Woodend Community Farmers Market by Ralf Thesing

Market Co-ordinator: Sharon Committee: Ralf, Maureen (we need additional members)

The market has now been going for 2 ½ years and has grown significantly over the last year. We now have between 55 and 60 stalls each month. We also have a loyal customer base, who plan their shopping around the farmers market calendar. And they have come out despite any sort of weather over winter, so spring markets promise to be even busier.

Winter is an issue however because of the grounds being very wet. We recently had to get a temporary permit in order to alter the layout of the market so that all vehicles stay off the grass.

The winter challenge and the fact that we are outgrowing the original footprint have let us to consider a "master plan" for the next 5-10 years. Anyone who can contribute to the plan about what we want the Woodend Farmers Market to look like should contact us to get involved.

Meggs Hannes-Paterson has handed over the management of the market to Sharon Kittson, who is doing a great job coordinating the market. But what we are missing are members on the Farmers Market sub-committee to meet once a month and facilitate decisions about the market. If you can help us or just want to come along to a meeting to learn more, please contact Ralf on 0412 042 169.

Macedon Ranges Vegetarian Eating Group (MRVEG) by Elvira Earthstar

The Macedon Ranges Vegetarian Eating Group (MR VEG) is now in its 3rd year. A loose network of vegetarians, vegans and lovers of vegetables, we meet sporadically for potluck lunches and dinners. A vegetarian food forum in September was well attended, with 50 people coming from across the state to hear about theory (Cathy Thesing, Dietitian) and practise (Jan and Elvira Earthstar, vegan mums) of animal free food. We catered for the Sustainable Living Festival in February, allowing some great conversations to be had about the environmental impact of consuming animals and the richness of plant-based eating. Look out for more exciting and delicious get-togethers in the year ahead!

Movies That Matter by Marg Thornell

Movies That Matter have moved through various interesting subjects this past year. We have looked at different ecovillages, quantum physics, Organic and Biodynamic farming, food production systems, alternative homes, Gerson Therapy and the way to good health through what we eat.

We are fortunate that the Vic Hotel allows us to use their upstairs room. We appreciate being able to have a great meal while we watch the movies and would like more people to support the pub as well as the MRSNG.

The movies are up to date and inspiring as well as sometimes controversial. We encourage you to come along and support the initiative at 7:30pm on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at the Victoria Hotel in Woodend.

Woodend Home Produce Exchange by Helen Scott

Now in its seventh or eighth year, the Exchange has become a great gathering of locals on the first Saturday of each month at Woodend Farmers Market. We've also coordinated with Krista's seasonal sessions at the Permaculture garden. All sorts of produce are swapped, and ideas, recipes and gardening tips shared throughout the year. Gardens keep producing even in winter.

The idea seems to be a popular one - in January we helped Trentham Food Hub with their first Produce swap, a local paper came to the last swap to write an article, and the Neighbourhood House asked us for a blurb for the Volunteers Week display in Woodend Library in May.

Helen Scott sends out a monthly email reminder with seasonal tips and interesting links to anyone who wishes - contact her at orseda@bigpond.com if you wish to be added to her list; there are now over 80 subscribers.

The Exchange has a presence on the MRSNG website at <http://www.mrsngonline.org.au/projects/food-localisation/produce-exchange/>

ZERO WASTE CHALLENGE by Nea Gyorffy

The third Zero Waste Challenge was held this year organised by Bendigo's Zero Waste Challenge Group. The Challengers were Bendigo, Macedon Ranges and Swan hill and I think the reigning champions (Bendigo) have won again though that is not official yet. The three groups combined to encourage people to reduce waste, repair, re-use and to recycle. It is amazing how you can really make a difference in the amount of waste you put into your bin. Some people put their waste bin out every two weeks or even monthly. If we all tried to reduce our waste imagine what a difference this would make to the amount of rubbish going to landfill. Gandhi said "Be the change you want to see in the world..."

Macedon candidates respond to community open letter on renewable energy by Alastair Fleming

In June, the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group and Friends of the Earth issued an open letter to candidates for the seat of Macedon, calling on them to respond to key renewable energy issues as Victoria heads to the polls.

Victoria currently has the world's most regressive restrictions on wind farms and has been without a state Renewable Energy Target for years.

But in a recent survey by the Australia Institute, 86% of Australians think Australia needs more renewable electricity and 80% want more electricity from wind.

Anti-wind farm laws introduced by former premier Ted Baillieu killed off a well-supported community wind farm proposal in Woodend.

To read the candidates responses in full, please visit the MRSG website – www.mrsgonline.org.au

Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival by Alastair Fleming, SLF coordinator

A total fire ban on a very hot Saturday 8 February 2014, could have seriously affected the outcomes of the fifth Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival. However, this was not to be, as more 1000 people attended the Festival, experiencing an enjoyable, informative and entertaining day for all the family.

The Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival is an educational initiative of the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group, developed to raise awareness of the environmental, economic, social and cultural challenges that our community faces in today's fast-paced and hectic world.

The aim of Festival is to be an oasis of ideas, products, and practical solutions that will inspire and inform visitors so they can enjoy living more sustainably.

Staged in the Community Hub and Garden at Forest Street, Woodend, the Festival benefited, once again, from the larger site area. Extending to the north of the garden into the Earnshaw Street grassed area, where a relaxing, sheltered 'village green' was created serviced by nearby food outlets and entertainment from the main stage.

Despite the very hot weather, attendance was only marginally down, with 1020 people attending.

Exhibitors

54 exhibitors, offering a wider range of sustainable living products and services, were present. Deliberately fewer than last year, this allowed for a less crowded layout and helped in part to create the relaxed and friendly atmosphere enjoyed by visitors.

More than a third of the exhibitors were here for the first time, including - the Holden Volt EV; PJT Plumbing with their PJT Sizzle and Clean Up Our Water campaign, Thermosmart Windows, Project 2 Bee or not 2 Bee and Macedon Ranges Shire Council.

MRVEG & MRSNG Smoothie Peddlers

The MRSNG Smoothie Peddlers also made their Festival debut, serving up more than 150 refreshing smoothies to sweltering patrons!

Once again, MRVEG excelled with the food, providing more than 300 servings from a range of tasty vegetarian and vegan delights – all freshly prepared and baked by a wonderful team of local volunteers.

Sustainability Pledges

An exciting new initiative was developed and implemented in 2014 – Sustainability Pledges.

Attendees were invited to pledge to do one more thing in their lives that would help them live or work more sustainably. They could then hang their pledge on the 'Pledge tree' - a wonderful steel sculpture kindly loaned by local artist Anton Hasell.

Activities

A number of activities initiated by exhibitors and volunteers, encouraged children to explore their creativity, musical abilities, sense of adventure and inner well-being! Each touched on a different sustainable theme, from reusing waste (making musical instruments) to potting native plants, environmental story telling and yoga.

Presentations

Another packed program of more than 20 presentations and workshops featured a range of highly informative topics by local experts and keynote presenters from Mariette Tuohey, Trent Hawkins of Beyond Zero Emissions and Julian Burnside QC.

From the ever popular permaculture garden tours to Water Wise Gardening, sustainable building practices and solar energy products to environmental issues such as the decline of the Honey Bee and the invasion of Indian Mynas; from renewable energy campaigns and initiatives to personal health and well-being; from social justice and equity to a short film showcase, there was something cool for everyone to escape inside from the heat.

Entertainment

Hosted by Sam Hasell, he featured as slam poet Mumblr in a terrific line up of local entertainers including the wonderful Blooming Lovelies, the brilliant Brothers Johnstone and Little Miss Red and the amazing Einstein, Jarrod Shaw and Sarah Wilkinson.

Sustainability Trail

Once again, the Woodend Sustainability Trail represented a key pillar of sustainable living – supporting and promoting local businesses and organisations.

By following the map, festival-goers were encouraged to visit 24 local retailers, galleries and cafés that incorporate sustainable practices in to their businesses. Each Trail partner made a pledge to introduce an additional sustainable practice in 2014. The MRSG will revisit the businesses later in the year to update on the progress of their pledges.

Wash Against Waste

The importance of Wash Against Waste at the Festival cannot be understated.

The Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival strives to be a zero waste event and Wash Against Waste is a key contributor to helping achieve that goal.

MRSG hires, from the Mount Alexander Sustainability Group, a trailer powered by solar PV with solar hot water washing facilities that enables us to dramatically reduce the waste we produce.

By replacing disposable items with washable crockery, cutlery and glassware the creation of a significant amount of waste is prevented - the most favoured option of the 'Waste Hierarchy'.

Thanks to the efforts of the team of volunteers, the WAW items are distributed to all food and drink outlets. These are then kept in circulation being collected, washed and redistributed throughout the day.

At the end of the day, the Festival produced only 1 bin of waste and 2 bins of recyclables –which works out to be 2/3L (50gms) of waste per person !

With the demise of programs such as Waste Wise Events and authorities hog-tied by private contracts, it is now up to organisations like the MRSG to initiate waste management programs for their events, and in doing so, help educate the community to embrace waste minimization and prevention as the most acceptable options for waste prevention.

The Festival in numbers

- Attendees – 1020
- Exhibitors – 55
- Presentations & Workshops – 21
- Pledges – 144
- Sustainability Trail partners - 24
- Maximum temperature on the day – 38.8° (Kilmore Gap)
- Waste generated – 1 bin (240L) of waste and 2 bins (480L) of recyclables

Financial support was gratefully received from:

- Bendigo Bank
- Lisa Chesters MP (sponsor of the CERES Energy Trailer)
- Joanne Duncan MP (sponsor of Wash Against Waste)
- 3 Fish
- Sacred Heart College – Sacred Earth Fundraising program

Thanks:

We would not have enjoyed this success without the help of 80 volunteers, whose enthusiasm and cheerful friendliness really made for a wonderful day and a worthwhile experience for participants and visitors alike. In particular:

- The Festival organising committee
- Ruth and Patrick Hodgson and the MRVEG team
- MRSG Garden Group
- Catherine, Anita and Udo, for creating and running the children’s activities
- Adam Johnstone for producing and managing the entertainment program
- Kate Lawrence, for her story telling
- The presenters and speakers
 - The more than 50 volunteers on the day, being: MRSG members, Hannah Merl and the Smoothie Peddlers, Braemar College students and staff
 - Volunteers assisting with the set up, being: MRSG members, Braemar College students and staff, Macedon Ranges Venturer Scouts
- In-kind support:
MRSG members (equipment/furniture/pick ups and deliveries/etc), Joanne Duncan MP (printing), Woodend Scouts (equipment), Uniting Church (furniture), Macedon Ranges Signs (updates to signs), Cambodian Kids Foundation (garden furniture and marquees), Community Foundation for Bendigo and Central Victoria (marquees), Nature’s Garden (fresh produce and storage), Woodend Cycles (tyres from the smoothie peddlers), Vline (promotional activities)