

FMBG Annual Report July 2020 – June 2021

On behalf of the FMBG Committee I have pleasure in presenting the annual report for the Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden (FMBG). This report covers the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who helps and supports FMBG in what has been a year probably like no other many of us have ever experienced. Lockdowns, no volunteers at the garden, skeleton crews, restricted numbers and more, affected our overall contribution to the garden. Fortunately, we have a great crew of FMBG volunteers committed to volunteering and working hard. The commencement of a Working for Victoria Team at the start of November helped get projects and maintenance back on track. The Team provided an invaluable contribution to the development of the garden, especially on the south side of the small lake project and the Eastern Australian Dryland Garden. They also built the Pollinator Project Beds as their last project at the garden. With the commencement of the team, the Working for Victoria Project also covered the costs of fencing the depot extension and the new gates. As a lasting legacy to their time at the garden, the individual members of the team contributed to the donation of a seat at the small lake. We thank the W4V Team for their contribution to the garden, a number of team were existing FMBG members at commencement and some became FMBG members.

Two grant projects were completed: Restoring Nature to the Small Lake, through a Federal Government Communities Environment Grant (\$21,300.40) and completion of planting around the main lake funded by a Landcare Grant (\$9,883.39).

We had another year with many outstanding achievements which include: developing new garden areas and maintaining and enhancing the established sections of the garden. COVID and government restrictions have greatly impacted our activities. On the positive side, COVID has caused an increase in people visiting and using the garden, especially for exercise.

We received a Melton City Council Environment Day Grant to install a solar battery at the Depot.

Guided Tours and Visitors

After being all set to go ahead with National Botanic Gardens Day at the end of May, we had to unfortunately cancel due to lockdown number 5.

It has not been a great year for guided tours and presentations as COVID restrictions put a stop to most of these. However, we did lead tours for the National Eucalypt Day, International Dendrology Society, Ballarat U3A Gardeners, Melbourne Polytechnic horticulture students, Bacchus Marsh Ladies Probosc Club, Nature Stewards graduation and Caroline Springs Senior Citizens.

We hosted the council Young Communities Holiday Activity on a Photography Walk and the Climate Resilience Landscape Forum for CRC Melton Year 12 students run by Royal Botanic Gardens of Victoria Melbourne.

Thanks to everyone who helped with the guided tours and presentations we were able to do.

FMBG Meetings

FMBG meetings were more off than on or held by Zoom. Committee Meetings were all online, we held the AGM in November by Zoom. We were able to get together for monthly meetings at the Depot in February with a BYO picnic. Fortunately, we had three face-to-face meetings in 2021 with guest speakers, Attila Kapitany in March, John Bentley in April and Sue Davis in May.

We had a good line up of guest speakers organised for our meetings. Hopefully, we can get the planned speakers who missed out, into our 2022 program.



The monthly meeting raffle was well supported, as we raised \$473 on the few occasions, we were able to meet.

Volunteer Hours

The table below shows the volunteer hours contributed through the Depot sign-in sheets:

Group/Activity	2020/21 Hours	2019/20 Hours	2018/19 Hours	2017/18 Hours
Creekers	421	334	538	675
Bushies	3	6	-	41
Clean Up Day	78	118	193	129
Botanic Gardens Day	-	-	219	175
Depot (inc. Admin)	56	161	296	279
Schools/TAFE Volunteering	-	60	210	112
Grow The Garden	154	153	215	131
Guided Tour Volunteers	15	193	223	44
Gumnuts	1,458	1,509	1,391	1,052
Lakers	1,680	1,405	1,018	934
National Tree Day	-	27	220	150
Nursery	2,005	2,150	2,695	3,023
Odd Jobbers	641	609	670	573
Open Days	-	-	273	-
SSG (PAG)	-	44	74	174
Sandgropers	-	-	-	196
Safaris	399	548	513	512
Tweeters	17	5	29	64
VVP	12	-	12	36
Water Babies	5	39	160	-
Council Annual Tour	-	-	20	-
Latham's Snipe Survey	11	60	29	26
Required hours volunteers	6,197	8,765	7,711	4,232
Total Hours	13,152	16,186	16,709	12,558

The volunteer hours in the table show we have contributed over 13,152 hours which is a decrease of 3,034 hours due to COVID lockdowns severely impacting the ability to volunteer from July to November. At the minimum wage rate of \$19.94/hr (1 July 2020) this equates to a value of \$262,251 in volunteer hours support the garden. However, the work we do is of a higher value than the minimum wage and many grant applications cost the volunteer contribution at \$25/hr which adds \$100,000 value to the total minimum wage value (note: many grants now use \$30 as a base volunteer rate, which would equate to a contribution of \$390,560). Also, we have not taken into account all the other activities we do as volunteers, such as: Committee Meetings, Working Party Meetings, other meetings, project management, collecting plants, external events e.g. presentations, fundraising activities such as Bunnings etc. and all those activities our volunteers do in their own time to support FMBG and the garden. We must not forget the volunteers who use their vehicles covering their running costs in many of our activities and in the garden. We have many volunteers who purchase or donate items without



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re-imbusement to support FMBG and our activities. All these contributions demonstrate what a dedicated and committed team of volunteers we have in FMBG. Well done everyone!

We continued a strong program for volunteers on required hours. Without their wonderful assistance across the garden and in administration we would have difficulty developing and maintaining the garden. Many have taken on specific curator roles for parts of the garden. Special thanks to Daryl Harris who helps coordinate these volunteers and he generously gives extra time to open and close the Depot and gates from Tuesday to Thursday at 8am and closing up at 1.30pm.

Our active groups in the garden and supporting groups are: Admin (Janet Dyke), Bushies (Steve Leyden), Creekers (Alan Partridge), Gumnuts/Sandgropers (David and Barb Pye), Lakers (Jill Bentley), Odd Jobbers (John Bentley), Safaris (Steve and Ella Parker), Sun-seekers (Ian Barnes/Wayne Fergeus), Tweeters group (Margaret Smith/Jaden Fanari), Water Babies (Jill Bentley), Collections and Records Management Team (John Bentley) and the Nursery Team (Anne Langmaid). We have again inducted a good number of new volunteers. Thanks to the leaders of these groups and the volunteers in those groups.

Thanks to everyone who has helped to ensure the Depot and areas are kept clean. This has especially been much more of a challenge with COVID to try to ensure improved cleanliness and sanitisation.

Many thanks to the leaders and volunteers who participate in the groups as their work can certainly be seen both in the development and maintenance of the garden beds which is reflected in the feedback from visitors.

Nursery

Thanks to Anne Langmaid, Nursery Manager and her team in managing the propagation and sale of plants. The sale of plants continues to be the major single source of funds to cover our operating expenses and helps support new projects and plants for the garden. There has been about a 10% decrease in overall plant sales from the previous year which can be attributed wholly to the impacts of COVID restrictions. A new nursery shed was installed in the new nursery extension area.

Promotion

Our patron Jane Edmanson has been continuing to promote FMBG at events she attends and has visited the Friends and MBG a couple of times during the year. Jane shot an ABC Gardening Australia story featuring Steve and Ella Parker at the Southern African Garden. The story is likely to appear on national television in 2022.

We continued our strong presence on social media and through our web page. FMBG and volunteers appeared in the Melton and Moorabool Star Weekly a couple of times. The garden has been mentioned even more by council in its communications through printed material, social media and the local newspaper.

Our external promotion of the botanic garden at events had to be put on hold due to cancellation of events. It was great to see the nursery able to have sales tables at the APS Geelong and the APS Melton and Bacchus Marsh plant sales.

We continued to give a couple presentations but these few and far between. However, we presented to the Kyabram Garden Club in person and the Nature Stewards course by Zoom. Presentations focussed on the development, existing gardens and plants of the Melton Botanic Garden.

Externally, John Bentley continued as the FMBG representative on the Plant Trust.

Many visitors are taking photos, posting and writing reviews of their visit, supplying positive feedback and encouraging others to visit.



Garden Development

New garden areas have been created and others further developed. Major areas in development include: 1) Lake south east and east sections to eventually complete planting all around the lake edge and freeway boundary 2) Small Lake Project 3) the Eastern Australian Dryland Garden, and 4) the avenue near the North Pond which the Creekers have been tending and planting.

Work on existing gardens continued: 1) completion of Tuscan Toppings on all paths in the Southern African Garden; 2) further plantings were done in all other garden beds, along the creek and around the lake.

Garden signage

We have been adding plant flag labels to enhance the visitor experience and have placed some wooden angled garden bed information signs into garden beds.

Plant Recording

Jennifer Peters, has wholeheartedly been learning more of the IrisBG capabilities and has been diligently entering plant records into IrisBG. Many thanks to Jennifer for her precise and hard work on this project.

Seating

Installation of more garden recycled seating was completed. Seat pads and concreting were done by Daryl, Robert, Milan and John. Rob, Jen, Stewart and James have installed the seats. We thank them all for their work in the seat installations.

Community Involvement

We have not been able to involve the community and other groups in FMBG activities due to COVID.

Council Funding

We received funding from the council budget of \$36,000 ex. GST to develop and maintain the garden. The funding continues each year until 2023. It is expended as per the MCC budget plan and monitored by council. There are responsibilities we have to comply with in expending public funds.

Membership

Individual memberships decreased slightly to 312 from 323 the previous year.

FMBG Memberships									
30 June	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Individual	312	323	303	235	233	251	236	218	207
Corporate	22	19	16	16	18	10	10	NA	NA
Associate	2	1	3	4	3	4	4	NA	NA

It is good the increasing support from businesses through corporate memberships.

Social Media

Our social media numbers have increased in all areas together with more visitor engagement through reactions, commenting, check-ins, sharing and posting.

FMBG Social Media Numbers					
	30 June	2021	% inc	2020	2019
MBG FB Page Likes		2,024	24.1%	1,631	1,300
MBG FB Page Followers		2,174	24.9%	1,741	NR
MBG FB Check-ins		2,493	-	NR	NR
Nursery FB Page Likes		923	36.7%	675	500
Nursery FB Page Followers		1,027	41.7%	725	NR
Nursery FB Check-ins		104	-	NR	NR
FMBG FB Page Likes		110	26.4%	87	NR
FMBG FB Page Followers		121	26.0%	96	NR
FMBG FB Group Members		695	41.0%	493	380
Twitter Followers		138	0.7%	137	124
Instagram Followers		706	55.5%	454	396

*NR – Not Recorded

Thankyous

We thank Adrian Cope from Melton City Council, the FMBG Liaison Officer who helps to address MBG issues and actions them. We had a new council elected in November. We welcomed Councillors and the new Mayor and thank them and council staff for their support and encouragement towards FMBG and their continued support towards the development and enhancement of the Melton Botanic Garden.

Thanks to Bunnings for donating the pavers for the Pollinator Project and materials for potting up activities.

Much of our fundraising has been done through plant sales, Bunnings Sausage Sizzles and donations in this financial year. Many thanks to everyone assisting in our fundraising efforts as we have been able to commit additional funds to develop the Depot, purchase new equipment and build the botanic garden.

Many thanks to all those who actively contributed during the year in so many ways. To those who make our monthly meetings run well by providing supper, helping set up chairs, tables (and sanitising the furniture), welcoming, QR Code checking-in and selling the raffle tickets. Finally, to everyone who has contributed to the many volunteer hours that go into propagating, maintaining, weeding, watering and planting, mulching, making paths to create, enhance and manage the Melton Botanic Garden.

Thanks go to the Admin Team for their work, which many of us do not see directly. Their efforts ensure we have items such as the volunteer hours diligently recorded.

The **FMBG Committee** continued its dedicated work and operated as a strong team, as it has been a year we where we all seem to be giving well over 100% in trying circumstances with the impact of COVID.

The FMBG Committee has done a wonderful job in helping to achieve a well-run and respected volunteer organisation in the Melton and the wider community.

The Committee has worked on new Strategic Plan 2021-2026. The plan was ready as a final draft at the end of June 2021, in preparation for feedback and then approval for release. The Action Plan, on which



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many hours have also been undertaken this year, will support the Strategic Plan by listing what actions we aim to do over coming years to help achieve the plan.

Many thanks to Barbara Frampton for a marvellous job as Secretary and Public Officer, and her invaluable commitment to continue in this role.

The Treasurer's role had been covered by John Bentley. Many thanks go to Corinne Cole, Manager, Sheryl Cole and Lauren Sim at Platinum Accounting & Taxation, a Corporate Member for entering, reviewing and maintaining our accounts in MYOB and organising our BAS for GST with the ATO. This superb and pro bono support from one of our Corporate Members has been greatly appreciated. The value of their accounting support contribution is \$3,500. Unfortunately for FMBG, Platinum Accounting have recently informed us that they will no longer be able to provide this service and support. We thank them for their years of support and their continuance as a corporate member.

Thanks to each of our committee members who have worked and supported the management of FMBG through their teamwork, discussion, research, honest feedback and decision making. Many thanks to Adrian B, Barbara F, Barb P, David P, Jen E, Jill B, John W and Susan B for their support, dedication and commitment throughout the year. Each one has contributed a significant amount and used their skills and talents in guiding FMBG.

Lastly, special thanks to Susan Beniston as a retiring Committee Member. Susan has provided commitment, insight and a valuable contribution to the FMBG Committee.

All these achievements and efforts throughout the year provide a strong foundation for us to continue our work to achieve our mission.

John Bentley

President, Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden

Report presented at the Annual General Meeting 8 September 2021



Category Winner

Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria
Sustainable Cities Awards 2013
2016 and 2018
sustainability.vic.gov.au/KABV



Mission: To enrich the community and the environment by fostering, promoting and supporting the development and activities of the Melton Botanic Garden.