

# Down's Estate Community Project

## Annual Report

### 2020-2021

The Down's Estate Community Project and our members acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Down's Estate land, the Boon Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin nation, and pay respect to their Elders past and present and emerging. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



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### **Committee elected February 2021:**

Robyn Erwin	President	Patrick Bellchambers	Ordinary member
Mary Rahilly	Vice President	Rod Fedley	Ordinary member
Maureen Griffin	Secretary	Karan Kent	Ordinary member
Angus Barnes	Treasurer		

NB. The 2019-20 Annual General Meeting was postponed until February 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions. The 2019-20 committee continued operating until this time.

### **Regular community and network engagements**

- Frankston Environment Friends Network meetings, monthly
- Seaford Farmers Market community stall, monthly
- University of Melbourne liaison committee, frequent meetings
- Frankston Council staff, frequent meetings
- Frankston Food Access Network, frequent meetings
- Frankston Community Garden network, periodic meetings

## President's Report

The year covered by this report, July 1 2020 to June 30 2021, was indeed a strange year for all in so many ways. Clearly, the greatest impact on the operations of Downs Estate Community Project was the influence of the COVID 19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. Bringing people together in the beautiful, open environment of Downs Estate, where they are able to connect with nature and each other, is at the heart of who we are and what we do. For much of the year, restrictions meant that we were not able to do this but I am pleased to say that despite this, the organisations managed to achieve a great many tasks, clarifying our direction, building our community and taking concrete steps towards a thriving community project.

### Business Cases

The year began with Melbourne in lockdown. The Downs committee was in the process of drafting the DECP Business Case with the support of the University of Melbourne and Frankston City Council, and based on many years of discussions and ideas from the many people who have engaged with the project since 2012.

As part of this process, we registered our domain name and created our new website and enhanced our social media presence with the support of experienced website designers and social media content creators.

Throughout September and October, we conducted community consultations on our draft Business Case. We held 10 online consultation focus groups attended by 51 community members and 143 completed an online survey. Participants included our members and others directly involved in the project, the wider local community and representatives of organisations including the Bunurong Land Council as the Registered Aboriginal Party for the land on which the project is sited, Nairn Marr Djambana Gathering Place, Frankston City Council representatives, local businesses, health and youth organisations etc. In both formats, participants provided overwhelming support for the project and its component activities.

A separate business case was completed in June 2020 for the restoration of the old farm house for use as a community space supporting the range of activities planned for the Downs site and a community museum. This document received high praise from Council, who noted that the standard was well above what would normally be received or expected from a community group.

On February 15 2021, Frankston City Council (FCC) unanimously passed a motion supporting the implementation of both business cases and requested a supporting Strategic Plan be provided to council by early 2022. Council approved that the planning for the house renovation proceed, with the support and oversight of Council, but stated that DECP would be required to source funding for the actual renovation from other funding bodies.

The Farm House renovation project progressed in April with consultations between DECP, FCC and their appointed architect. This led to an initial concept design to provide a multi-use all weather venue. Details of the design were still under discussion at the end of the financial year.

The business case consultation process led to a strengthening and broadening of networks and the possibilities of a number of partnerships. This included partnering with Belvedere Community Centre to deliver adult education programs at DECP, beginning with 2 adult community education food growing courses in 2021, and a connection with the Salvation Army's Tools For The Trade youth program.

## New Infrastructure

Frankston City Council generously supported DECP through completion of infrastructure works across the site that included pedestrian and vehicle pathways, a carpark and disabled carpark, a large verandah attached to the shed, solar panels and batteries providing power to the site, lights and CCTV, a small tank to supply water to the shed, a water filter, taps, bench and sinks, improved and enlarged water collection from the shed and verandah roof connected to existing water tanks and a new 100000 litre water tank located behind the garden area. We are incredibly grateful for this support that will greatly assist in enabling our planned expansion of activities and numbers of regular users of the site. We also thank both DECP members and council staff who worked collaboratively throughout this installation process to ensure a successful outcome.

## Sustainable Indigenous Agriculture Partnership

Our joint Sustainable Indigenous Agriculture project with the University of Melbourne continued but our plans for community workshops were much altered due to COVID restrictions. The project facilitated the delivery of a workshop for chefs at William Angliss College held in May and planning was well underway for a community workshop to be delivered with Nairm Marr Djambana Gathering Place.

We collaborated on the development of a 'Local Pick' logo for use with indigenous food crops grown at the DECP site and with the intention that the logo be available for use with indigenous food growing projects elsewhere.



Five international university students visited Downs for 3 working bees in October / November and in December 2020 we jointly held a Field Day for a larger group of students including a tour of the site, discussion of indigenous crops, demonstration of use of kakalla (pig-face), planting of indigenous food trees and general work in the garden. This was generously catered for by Nairm Marr Djambana.

The University successfully negotiated with the Helen McPherson Smith Trust to reallocate funding within the SIA grant from development of a software system to fund an outdoor kitchen for DECP.

## Garden Closures

DECP members and particularly regular and occasional gardeners were greatly disappointed when Frankston City Council decided to close all community gardens during COVID 19 lockdowns. With the support of community gardens across Frankston, a letter was written to FCC to express our feeling that community gardens should remain accessible to their members throughout lockdowns as places that are sources of food and that horticulture, agriculture and permaculture were all classed as permitted activities under lockdown rules but unfortunately we were unable to alter the restrictions imposed.

As a result of long periods of not being able to access the garden, large grassy weeds took control of most of the garden area. Combined with increased rainfall creating large ponds of water we restarted gardening with increased habitat for both snakes and rats and the huge task of removal of weeds and reclaiming garden beds. This work continued for several months, greatly impacting our planting activity and subsequent harvest.

## Organisational Teams

At our last AGM in February 2021, we launched our new organisational structure which included 5 teams to work alongside the Committee, with each focussing on implementing one of the 5 core activities areas identified in the business case: Urban Agriculture, Farm House Restoration, Community Gathering, Healthy Eating and Food Sharing and Ecosystem Regeneration. In order to activate teams and establish roles, responsibilities, systems of operation and communication a Planning Day was scheduled but unfortunately delayed until after the end of this reporting year due to COVID lockdowns and the desire to do this work face to face. *(Half of this Planning Day was eventually conducted as a series of online forums for individual teams with the second half still planned as a face to face workshop with all participating together, to further establish relationships, communications and responsibilities between teams and committee of management.)*

## Youth Program

In Term 1 of 2021, DECP trialled a partnership with the Tools for The Trade (TFTT) 10 week program, that provides skills and pathways for youth who are disengaged from the school system.

Downs Estate acted as a site for TFTT groups to visit to gain practical experience in trades relating to both horticulture and woodwork. The kids in this program have challenges in their lives but in their own ways showed a sense of real achievement in constructing basic garden bed-frames and expressed how good it felt to be in a big natural space. The site was also used for an end-of-program celebration with a Tongan 'uma' (meat and vegetables cooked in the ground) greatly enjoyed by participants and DECP volunteers. This program was also greatly disrupted by COVID lockdowns but will continue into the future.

## Community Environment Program (CEP) Weed eradication grant

DECP had received a grant in early 2020 to eradicate major weeds from the site. From November 2020 this work was greatly supported through teams of Holmesglen TAFE students studying Horticulture and Natural Resources Management, led by their teacher Joab Wilson. Students visited the site on a number of occasions learning about the site and its vegetation, assessing and mapping weeds, and later undertaking weed removal works. A partnership with Port Philip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority resulted in a Working for Victoria funded work crew engaged by PPWCMA visiting the site on 3 occasions to also undertake weed controls work with contractors later engaged to also carry out a large proportion of remaining weed removal. All of these tasks were supported by DECP members and committee both on site and through management of the grant alteration negotiations required due to COVID related delays.

## Other Community Connections

Two grants were successfully obtained – a Vic Health grant for 3 rounds of 6 classes of Wayapa Wuurrk Aboriginal yoga and a grant from Sustainable Table for a rabbit proof fence and water infrastructure (identified by Sustainable Table as a first step in an ongoing relationship towards supporting projects specified in the Business Case).

DECP again hosted participants in the Farmer Incubator Pop Up Garlic Farmer program with 3 women participating.



Regular yoga classes with local yoga school Sudhama began on Saturday mornings in our beautiful setting on the grass nearby the garden for a gold coin donation

A Full Moon Gathering was held on December 30, 2022.

On April 21 we welcomed the local community to the site for an Urban Agriculture Day including a Food Swap and tour of the food growing areas.

### Membership

DECP will continue to offer free membership at this time and in the 2022/23 financial year consider options for introduction of a small membership fee in consultation with members and teams.

### Thank you to all our members and contributors

All of the above could not have happened without the many and varied contributions of the growing DECP community, who give their time and skills generously, and of our partners, stakeholders and supporters. We, the DECP Community so greatly value each contribution large and small that is given from the heart, to help build a stronger local community, more connected to each other and their surrounding environment. On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank each and every one of you.



*Thank You*

Pat, Rod, Fran, Ash, Regina, Maureen, Victoria, Mary, Karan, Angus, Patrick, Sam, Carol, Eve, Klaus, Dierdre, Mary, InSun, Christine, John, Brendan, Alex, Sam, Ruth, Tina, Manfred, Kathleen, Kathryn, Henri, Colette, Joab, Dorin, Nick, Evan, Ken, Dan, Martin, Meredith, Mike, Jade

