

Biolinks Alliance; Chair's Report, November 2018

We are continuing to roll out the Board development program recently put together with Andrew Donovan, and Dale Simpson is also assisting with Board recruitment – currently considering candidates for the positions of Treasurer (highest priority) and Secretary.

Key areas of progress since the first phase of Board development activities includes a new Board meetings schedule (strategic and reporting); a draft Delegations Policy (being considered at this meeting); and finalisation of the employment contract for Sophie in the Executive Director position. These are important achievements because they are part of a new phase of Board governance as we ensure we have both the funds and the processes in place to run the organisation more clearly and efficiently. In particular it better supports the ED position giving Sophie the clarity and confidence to get on with overseeing and implementing our plans – be it in fundraising or the planning/communications of projects etc.

As we are all no doubt acutely aware, this next six months will be critical for the Fundraising Program – not only do we need to reach and hopefully exceed our HMST targets, but also need to ensure we have capacity to continue raising the funding needed beyond the life of this grant. There have been a number of recent FR events – such as spotlighting gilders in the Wombat Forest and another terrific donor event at the Giving Hub on Wellington Street with Gary Tabor (who was briefly over from the US to visit relatives). Other events are planned before the end of the year and major event with a keynote speaker is mooted for Bendigo early in the New Year (subject: Grey headed Flying foxes). Sophie, Linda and FR SC are working hard to ensure we can convert these activities into new donations both from existing supporters and (most importantly) from new ones.

As I have stated before, we need to ensure we have the wherewithal and confidence to grow our programs over the coming years in order to match our ambitions for Biolinks and indeed address the urgent need to change the way we do conservation in central Victoria. Part of this will require we get better at reaching out to the broader community and tapping into the currents and stories in the media and broader public domain. In recent times I've been aware of both alarming stories (e.g. the urgency around acting on climate change; worsening status of platypus – a species once abundant across central Victoria) as well as others with a more positive and encouraging tone (e.g. the VEAC western forests investigation and recent attention on regenerative agriculture *a la* Charles Massey's recent book "*The Call of the Reed Warbler*"). By further building our communications capacity we can take advantage of them all as an opportunity to raise our profile and supporter base. Tahli has been doing some great stuff with social media and on our website, including the production of videos from events such as the recent Wedderburn workshop (see below).

There has also been good progress with our projects in recent months – The "Restoring Leaky Landscapes" workshop with Wedderburn Conservation Management Network attracted a lot of local attention, and there are plans now for a follow up "prospectus" over summer that we hope will be funded by one or more of the stakeholders involved. Meanwhile Sophie and Peter have been involved with some productive scoping meetings with groups in Upper Goulburn/Strathbogrie region, and there has been groundwork for the Heathcote Project (which was recently funded under a grant from Bendigo Council). The model of community engagement we are developing under these projects is perhaps more important than any of the outcomes that might emerge in any particular area. In a nutshell the Local Area Planning (LAP) process is about brokering projects based on landscape-scale thinking with active groups, incorporating: the science and technology, the funding and building group capacity.

Plans are already coming together for our next symposium in May 2019 possibly in the Nagambie region focusing on a theme of "Restoring Landscapes" – with links to regenerative agriculture and improving landscape function (repairing landscape scale processes and boosting ecological observation and literacy skills – i.e. "reading landscapes"). As with past symposia, we hope the next one will help define the discussion in the community about how conservation ought to be approached in the future.

There have also been developments with La Trobe University – Sophie and I attended their “Centre for Future Landscapes” Symposium recently at Bundoora; there has been some preliminary discussion on possible partnerships with the University with one significant current prospect called: “the Yam Project” that may be funded through La Trobe Alumni and also involving Professor Susan Lawrence (Historian recent involved with our Ararat Symposium) and Historian, Bruce Pascoe.

One of the next steps in Board Development will be the first major review of our Strategic Plan which at this stage we hope to kick off with a major Board workshop over a weekend early next year. As per Andrew Donovan’s suggestion we hope to do this with his support or some other suitable facilitator. We also need to: continue with Board recruitment; set up key sub-committees such as Finance and Budgeting; do our Business Planning and clearly articulate the narrative of the organisation. The highlight of our last gathering was a terrific discussion with Dale Simpson on how to improve our messaging around the Biolinks narrative. I look forward to further development of this work into 2019.

Please have a long and relaxing break over the Christmas/New Year period (I know I will at least try to have one), and as always, I’m looking forward to working actively with you next year as we continue to further build Biolinks together.

Cheers,



Paul Foreman

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