



September 2015 Newsletter

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Management of Tree Decline in Mount Eliza

In cooperation with MEAFEC the Shire has been installing possum bands on trees along roadsides, in parks and reserves since July 2013 and good results have been seen except where it was too late for the tree.

In May this year 12 trees were banded in Millbank Bushland Reserve and a further 15 trees were banded in Moorooduc Quarry adding to the 49 trees previously banded in 2014. Helping with this project is the federally funded Government program "The Green Army" who are 17 to 24 year olds joining with our friends groups to protect Mt Eliza reserves. The Green Army in this instance has been monitoring and collecting useful data regarding banded trees in Mount Eliza whilst they in return gain experience in environmental conservation fields to aid employment prospects in the future. For further information see

<http://www.environment.gov.au/land/green-army>

Jeff Yugovic spoke to the Mt Eliza Woodland Residents Association at their AGM on 10 August about the tree decline and on practical ways of saving trees.

Biosis (Jeff Yugovic) is conducting a workshop with the Shire's Natural Systems Team on management options for tree protection this month. Massive biomass reduction of the bushland reserves, aiming to bring possums back into balance and lessen the fire danger, will be explored. Mount Eliza's bushland reserves are overgrown compared to the open vegetation structure at the time of the Aborigines, reducing biodiversity and providing the potential for a megafire.

For information on the Mount Eliza tree decline phenomenon see the discussion paper "*Do ecosystems need top predators? A review of native predator-prey imbalances in south-east Australia with reference to tree decline on the Mornington Peninsula*" on our web site:

<http://www.meafec.com/ecosystems.pdf>

You can prevent this happening! Call the Shire on 1300 850 600 to report threatened trees.



Toxic Foam Damages Coastal Vegetation in Mount Eliza

Strange toxic foam produced in large amounts during storm surges is damaging coastal vegetation in Mount Eliza. The foam is generated when a high tide coincides with a strong WNW wind. It is whipped up by the wind and waves and blown inland in spectacular foam events. The foam damages and generally kills foliage like a contact herbicide.



Foam event, 26 August 2012, north of Canadian Bay
Photo courtesy of John Scholes

The foam phenomenon is known by locals and has occurred for many years. The most recent event was on 6 May 2015 and was covered in the *Mornington News* on 21 July.

Toxic foam events usually occur in the colder months when storm surges are more likely due to higher average sea levels and when cold fronts bringing winds are stronger.

In June 2015 MEAFEC paid the Environmental Analysis Laboratory to ascertain the contents of the foam, they reported 'elevated' anionic surfactants and hydrocarbons in foam residue collected in May 2015. 'Elevated' anionic surfactants were found in the foam water but there was not enough material to test for hydrocarbons in the foam water.

When MEAFEC asked the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to comment on this finding; they said 'there are no standards or safe limits for surfactants or any substances in foam water and foam residue as they are rare materials'. Furthermore there are no standards for surfactants in marine water and therefore it is not possible for the EPA to comment on MEAFEC's test results.

However in Western Treatment Plant statistics the EPA anionic surfactant limit in discharge water is 0.8 mg/L according to the Melbourne Water website. Our laboratory foam test results detected an anionic surfactant reading of 7.0 mg/L, for further information refer to [http://www.melbournewater.com.au/getinvolved/education/Documents/WTP%20discharge%20statistics%20\(VCE%20SAC\).pdf](http://www.melbournewater.com.au/getinvolved/education/Documents/WTP%20discharge%20statistics%20(VCE%20SAC).pdf)

The origin of the foam is not clear as foam can be natural or generated by surfactants in sewage outfall. It would be surprising if it is natural as it is produced in particularly large quantities and local native coastal plants are expected to be adapted to spray foam. Salt spray is known to damage coastal vegetation but not salt-tolerant plants (halophytes) such as Australian Salt-grass *Distichlis distichophylla* which is severely affected by foam at Mount Eliza.

Worsening of salt spray damage by surfactants present in sewage disposed of at sea has been observed in Europe, on trees planted around metropolitan beaches in Australia, and in the Barwon Heads area in Victoria.

Of possible relevance is the observation that the strong WNW wind is coming directly across the Bay from the area of the outfalls of the Western Treatment Plant (WTP) which are 44 to 49 km away at Cocoroc and Point Wilson. The WTP is a known source of surfactant, much of it being detergent, but it is reportedly below the EPA limit. Some form of concentration on the water surface may be producing the foam.

The foam is a skin irritant and it is advisable to wear rubber gloves and eye protection when handling this material.

On 27 July MEAFEC wrote to Melbourne Water for comment but no response has been received to date.

Inaugural Planting Day – Earimil Estuary Group



At Ranelagh Beach on Sunday 23 August 2015 approximately 300 plants were installed by a coordinated team from Green Army, Mornington Shire Natural Systems Team, Ranelagh Club and the recently formed Earimil Estuary Group (EEG) *see back page for more details.*

All plants have been propagated from seeds collected along the foreshore reserve. The Shire nursery contributed 200 plants and MEAFEC the remaining. The Ranelagh Club kindly purchased tree guards for the project. These will remain the property of Ranelagh Club and will be used for future projects.

Many thanks to the Green Army team, the Mornington Peninsula Shire and the Ranelagh Club for their cooperation and contribution. Also, thanks should be given to Des Berry, MEAFEC President, for instigating and project managing this initiative.

The site had been cleared by Green Army two months prior, the Shire had mulched the woody weeds on site and our first task was to spread this mulch over the prepared area. Then plants were inserted through the mulch and watered in with tree guards protecting the plants as they become established.

The entire planting was completed in 2 hours and the works team accepted the kind invitation from Ranelagh Club for drinks and nibbles on the patio overlooking the foreshore. The weather was sunny with calm winds, the hard working team in good spirits and the social gathering after the event very welcome.

This planting day is the start of the restoration of native vegetation along the Ranelagh Beach section of the Mount Eliza Foreshore Reserve. The Ranelagh Club has environment works underway along the lower reaches of Earimil Creek and plantings in this area will occur next month.

Earimil Estuary Group is under the coordination of MEAFEC who will maintain and monitor the plantings and will prepare future plans to extend the restoration program south toward Earimil Lookout.



The long term strategy will be to link up the high quality vegetation area south of Earimil Lookout (under the Shire and Mount Eliza Coastcare Management) with the high quality vegetation at Ranelagh Rocks.

Friends Groups

MOUNT ELIZA CFA 3rd Sunday
monthly 9:30am to 11:30am



EARIMIL CREEK 3rd Saturday
monthly 9:30am to 11:30am



BADEN POWELL RESERVE weekly
Tues 9:30am Coralie 9787 7228



WILLIAMS ROAD BEACH Friday
weekly 10am–3pm Ann9787 7228



MOOROODUC QUARRY meets 4th Sunday of
each month from 10:00am to Noon.
Call Gerard on 9787 2507



New Friends Group - Earimil Estuary Group



Exciting things are happening at Ranelagh Beach and lower Earimil Estuary. Recently the Green Army has been working from Earimil lookout Northward, removing boxthorn and Polygala alongside the tracks leading to the beach. They have worked their way along the Foreshore Reserve to Earimil creek, clearing behind the bathing boxes immediately in front of Ranelagh Club. On August 23rd a planting day occurred for the Foreshore Reserve and for some areas of Lot B along the creek.

Ranelagh Club have recently completed a clean-up of Earimil Creek lower Estuary combining a SE Water grant with an equal value funds from the club to remove blackberry, boxthorn, boneseed – and Ranelagh Club is planning to extend this work along the creek inland.

We are working very closely with Ranelagh Club and the Green Army coordinators to maximise the outcome of these efforts.

A new friends group is being formed – the Earimil Estuary Group (EEG), which will continue efforts of weed control in the area, and work with the Ranelagh Club to restore native vegetation along the Foreshore Reserve. The first action for this group was the planting along the Foreshore Reserve on August 23rd where Green Army cleared weeds and through a local mail out volunteers were invited to join with the Ranelagh Club to assist with this planting. The Earimil Estuary Group will work along the Foreshore Reserve, and with the permission of Ranelagh Club, work along the upper banks of Earimil Creek within Lot B which is managed by the Ranelagh Club. Call Des on 0419 992 939 for more information.

VICTORY RESERVE 3rd Sunday
monthly (Aug to Nov) from 1 to
4pm. Call Gerard 9787 2507



BANOOK RESERVE 2nd Sunday
mthly 10am–12. Ross 9785 1243

