NOVEMBER 2025

2025 Annual Report

Victorian Environment Friends Network

Presented to

VEFN Community & Supporters



Photo: Will Harper

Dandenong Creek

Acknowledgement of Country



The Victorian Environment Friends Network acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Victoria.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we recognise the enduring connection First Nations Peoples hold to Country — a connection of care, culture, and responsibility that continues unbroken.

We honour their custodianship and the deep knowledge that has cared for these landscapes for tens of thousands of years.

As volunteers working to protect and restore our local environments, we commit to walking respectfully alongside Traditional Owners in the shared work of caring for Country.

Convenor’s Report: Reflections on 2025 Achievements and Future Directions



This has been a big year for VEFN — one of growth, reconnection, and strengthening the foundations we rely on. What stands out most to me is the passion and generosity of the volunteers who care for their local environments. Everywhere I’ve been, I’ve seen groups doing incredible work with limited resources and endless commitment.
Two major milestones shaped the year: the launch of our new website and the completion of our strategy review. Both have helped clarify our purpose and improved the way we support and communicate with Friends groups across Victoria.



Convenor, Anthony Bigelow

We also secured significant support from DEECA, who have funded two part-time roles for VEFN over the next two years which will support our members and help transform the organisation. This investment gives us stability and the capacity to plan ahead with confidence — something we haven’t had for a long time.
Membership has continued to grow strongly, with numbers more than doubling since last year. It’s clear that groups are looking for connection, advocacy, and a trusted voice, and we’re committed to being that support.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to VEFN this year — whether through committee work, subcommittees, projects, or simply encouraging us along the way. Your effort is what keeps the network moving forward.
As we look ahead, our goal remains simple: to support Friends groups, amplify their work, and continue building a strong, connected volunteer community across Victoria.

Our Membership





VEFN now represents more than 180 member groups across Victoria — over 15,000 volunteers caring for local parks, reserves, waterways, and bushland.
This year saw exceptional growth, with membership increasing by 115%.

Key Highlights

- 180+ member groups statewide
- Representing 15,000+ conservation volunteers
- 115% membership growth since last year
- Stronger onboarding and visibility through the new website
- Growing reach and engagement across all regions



What This Means for VEFN

A larger, more connected membership base strengthens our advocacy, enhances our collective voice, and expands opportunities for training, collaboration, and community impact.



Key Achievements

- **New Website Launched:** A major milestone for VEFN. The new site now gives member groups clearer access to resources, support, and a stronger statewide presence.
- **Strategy Review Completed:** A full review of VEFN's strategy has helped clarify our purpose, priorities, and long-term direction to better support Friends groups.
- **$200,000 DEECA Funding Secured**: VEFN secured a two-year **$200K** grant from DEECA, enabling the creation of two part-time roles and providing long-needed stability and capacity to support our members.
- **Strong Membership Growth:** Membership has increased by more than **115%** since last year — reflecting renewed engagement, broader reach, and growing confidence in VEFN's role.
- **Partnerships Strengthened:** New MOUs with Landcare Victoria Inc. and 15Trees strengthen collaboration and open new pathways for support and engagement across Victoria.
- **Celebration at Parliament:** A highlight of the year, bringing Friends groups from across the state together to recognise community-led environmental stewardship and share stories with key stakeholders and partner, Landcare Victoria.





The VEFN Team



The VEFN Committee has worked throughout the year to strengthen our network, improve governance, and deliver clearer support for Friends groups across Victoria. Each member has contributed time, insight, and energy to help steer VEFN through a period of renewal and growth.

Committee Members – 2025:

- **Anthony Bigelow – Convenor**
- **Jessica Gerger– Deputy Convenor**
- **John Orr – Treasurer**
- **Margaret Hunter – Secretary**
- **Graham Ross – Committee Member**
- **Carol Challis – Committee Member**
- **Laura Mumaw – Committee Member**
- **Callum Clark - Committee Member**
- **Clive Eddington - Committee Member**

Acknowledgements

🌿 Thank you to John Orr
John will be stepping down as Treasurer as he prepares for extended travel in 2026.
We sincerely thank him for his steady guidance over the last two years, clear financial oversight, and the generosity he has shown in supporting VEFN through a time of transition. His work has strengthened our financial processes and helped set VEFN up for the years ahead.

🌿 Thank you to Graham Ross
Graham has provided four years of tireless commitment, leadership, and continuity through some of VEFN's most challenging and transformative periods.
We are deeply grateful for his dedication and steady presence.

Special Thanks

🌿 **Thank you to the Website Team: Clive Eddington & Jessica Gerger**
The launch of the new VEFN website simply wouldn't have been possible without Clive and Jessica's commitment and skill.
Clive brought the structure, build, and technical reliability to life, while Jessica worked tirelessly to create every member profile page by hand, ensuring our community is represented clearly and consistently.
Their combined effort has given VEFN a modern, functional, and welcoming platform that will support members for years to come.

Advocacy Subcomittee Update

The VEFN Advocacy Subcommittee (VAS) was established last year to strengthen VEFN's ability to represent the community voice in environmental policy and decision-making. VEFN is uniquely placed to advocate for the value of nature and the volunteers who care for it, and the VAS worked throughout the year to build a clear, structured advocacy approach.

From July 2024 to June 2025, the subcommittee focused on developing position statements, campaigns, and key resources outlining VEFN's advocacy purpose, goals and actions. This included preparing educational materials for the VEFN website and contributing to the Thrive resource to help members better understand advocacy, politics and the election cycle.

The VAS met nine times during the year and strengthened relationships with key stakeholders including DEECA, Melbourne Water, and Parks Victoria. The team also explored pro bono legal support with HWL Ebsworth and Maddocks, though conflicts and workload prevented assistance at this stage.

Key advocacy actions included:

- Engagement with DEECA on the redesign of Action Statements under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act
- A Letter of Support to the Australian Government regarding protection of Matters of National Environmental Significance under the EPBC Act
- A joint submission supporting the KORS/FoE request to vary approval conditions for the Western Highway Upgrade
- A Position Statement on Australia's Nature Strategy
- A forthcoming Position Statement on water use in data storage facilities, in alignment with the Concerned Waterways Alliance

VEFN thanks all VAS members — Dr Nadine Richings (Chair), Anthony Bigelow, Graham Ross, Andrew Kelly, Jordan Crook, and ecologist David de Angelis — for their insight, commitment and leadership throughout the year.



Education & Skills Subcomittee Update

The Education & Skills Subcommittee focused much of its energy this year on supporting the development and rollout of VEFN's new website — a major project that required significant time and attention. Despite this, the team still delivered several engaging learning opportunities for members.

Three excellent guest talks were hosted during the year:

- Dr Jake Robinson — Urban Soil Biodiversity
- Dr Jake Robinson — The Nature of Pandemics
- Simon Mustoe — How to Survive the Next 100 Years: Lessons From Nature

These sessions were informative, well-attended, and sparked great discussion across the network.

The subcommittee looks forward to expanding its program next year, with the aim of offering more talks and increasing opportunities for face-to-face learning and networking with member groups.









Subcommittee Highlights

Communications & Digital Subcommittee

The team strengthened VEFN's communications this year, supporting the launch of the new website and improving newsletters and digital engagement to help members stay connected.

We thank **Carol Challis** for leading the subcommittee and **Stephen Derrick** for producing the FriendsNET bulletin. Their work has kept information flowing across the network.

Partnerships & Engagement Subcommittee

This subcommittee focused on maintaining strong relationships with partner organisations and exploring new opportunities for collaboration.

A key area this year has been rebuilding a constructive relationship with **Parks Victoria**. With recent changes in management and the completion of the PV review, we're encouraged by a more open and collaborative approach emerging, which is important to many of our members.

Resourcing Subcommittee

Formed this year alongside VEFN's new Resourcing Policy, this subcommittee is focused on building long-term funding strategies. A key priority is delivering the DEECA grant objective of developing a sustainable funding model through philanthropic, government, and private sector support. This work is essential for ensuring that the outcomes and partnerships established through the project can continue beyond the initial funding window.





Financial Snapshot 2024–25

This year was one of significant investment and growth for VEFN. With strong support from members and partners, we delivered two major priorities — launching our new website and completing our strategy review. These projects created a planned deficit but were essential in strengthening VEFN's foundations and future capacity.

Key Points

- **Closing funds at 30 June 2025: $30,556.20**
- **Major investments:** Website development and strategic plan update
- **Core income sources:** Membership fees, VicReturn funding, and BFA grant
- **Expenditure focus:** Communications, digital infrastructure and engagement

These investments position VEFN for long-term stability and enable us to better support Friends groups across Victoria.

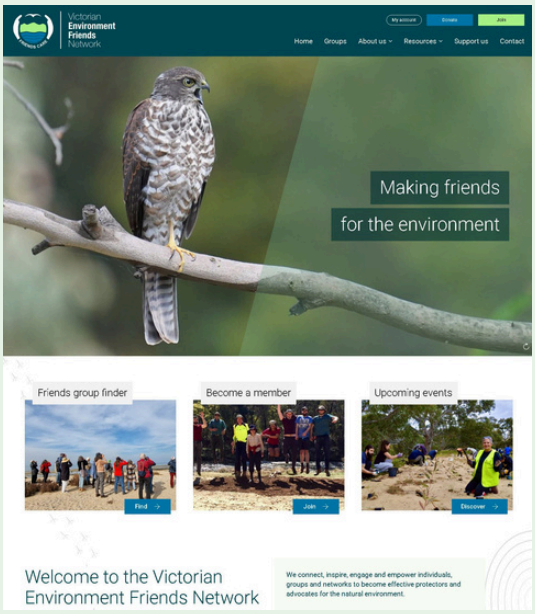
Opening Balances 1 July 2024	**YTD Actual**	**Annual Budget**
Accrued Expenses	-$398.40	-$398.40
Main Account	$46,717.54	$46,717.54
Gift Account	$100.00	$100.00
Debit Card	$31.19	$31.19
Total Opening Balances	**$46,450.33**	**$46,450.33**
Receipts/Incomings		
Membership Fees	$1,685.00	$1,500.00
Vic Return Funding Award	$1,500.00	$1,500.00
Vic Return Funding Administration	$1,000.00	$1,000.00
Melbourne Water Grants	$500.00	$500.00
Grant BFA	$5,500.00	$5,500.00
Total Receipts/Incomings	**$10,185.00**	**$10,000.00**
Expenditures/Outgoings		
Operating Expenses		
Website Development	$14,807.00	$26,000.00
Strategic Plan Development	$5,000.00	$6,300.00
Awards	$1,960.22	$5,500.00
Vic Return Award	$1,500.00	$1,500.00
Admin Support	$0.00	$2,500.00
Mail Chimp	$1,461.30	$1,350.00
Internet Costs	$179.55	$300.00
Zoom Costs	$161.42	$300.00
Insurance	$891.06	$891.06
Membership of VNPA	$118.18	$0.00
Promotional Material	$0.00	$0.00
Annual Meeting Costs	$0.00	$500.00
GST to be recovered/paid	$0.40	$0.00
Sundry	$0.00	$600.00
Total Expenditures/Outgoings	**$26,079.13**	**$45,741.06**
Result	**-$15,894.13**	**-$35,741.06**
Closing Balances		
Accrued GST	$1,292.00	
Main Bank Account	$29,138.43	$10,578.08
Gift Bank Account	$100.00	$100.00
Debit Card Account	$25.77	$31.19
Total Funds	**$30,556.20**	**$10,709.27**

Building a stronger VEFN

Strategy Review

This year we completed a full review of VEFN's strategic direction. The process helped identify clear priorities for the next three years — strengthening support for Friends groups, improving communication and visibility, and building a more sustainable organisation. The review also shaped our updated governance, engagement, and operational approach. Thank you to Jason Clarke at Minds at Work





Website Launch

In October 2024, VEFN launched its new website — a major milestone.

The site now provides:

- centralised resources for member groups
- clearer pathways for joining and connecting
- improved visibility for all 180+ member groups
- a modern platform for sharing events, stories, and advocacy work

The new website was a significant investment but one that positions VEFN for long-term capability and reach.

DEECA Building Community Capacity Grant

VEFN was awarded a $200,000, two-year grant through DEECA's Building Community Capacity Program.

This funding supports:

- two part-time roles (Program Support + Communications)
- development of a long-term funding sustainability strategy
- better systems and processes to strengthen VEFN's statewide coordination
- delivery of the strategy review outcomes
- improved support for member groups
- stronger partnerships across the sector

This grant represents a major step forward for VEFN and will help secure a stronger and more stable future for the network.

Partnerships & Collaboration



VEFN's work is strengthened by the organisations we partner with. This year we continued to deepen relationships that support Friends groups, improve coordination, and increase opportunities for advocacy, funding, and community impact.

DEECA – Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Regular collaboration, including work together on the Building Community Capacity project that helps strengthen VEFN's future direction.

Melbourne Water
Ongoing collaboration on local waterway care, community engagement, and support for Friends groups across multiple regions.

Parks Victoria
A renewed and increasingly positive partnership, following organisational changes. Members are seeing more consistent communication and new opportunities for coordinated project work.

Landcare Victoria Inc.
A formal MOU now connects our networks and strengthens statewide support for community-led environmental action.

15Trees
A second MOU supports planting opportunities for VEFN groups and strengthens our collaborative model for on-ground projects.

These relationships help ensure that the voice of community volunteers remains strong, supported, and heard at every level.

Highlights

Representing 180+ member groups
Supporting 15,000+ conservation volunteers across Victoria
Awarded a $200,000 DEECA Building Community Capacity grant

180+ members

Significant growth of more than 115% since last year

Engagement

Mailchimp audience: 6,500+ subscribers
Facebook community: 1,000+ followers
Growing reach across newsletters, digital updates, and community events

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Reach

Together, VEFN member groups care for thousands of hectares of public land and waterways through on-ground restoration, citizen science, monitoring, advocacy, and community engagement.

Get Involved

VEFN's strength comes from the passion, skills, and commitment of people across our network. If you'd like to play a bigger role in supporting Friends groups and community-led conservation across Victoria, there are several ways to get involved.

Join a Subcommittee
Our subcommittees help drive core areas of VEFN's work — advocacy, education, partnerships, communications, and resourcing.
If you have time, skills, or interest in any of these areas, we'd love to hear from you.

Become a Trusted Advisor
If you have professional or specialist skills but limited time, you can offer advice or support on a project-by-project basis.
This flexible role has been incredibly valuable to our work this year.

Step Onto the Committee
We welcome expressions of interest from members who want to help shape VEFN's direction, support Friends groups, and strengthen our statewide impact.

Share Your Skills
Expertise in areas such as communications, IT, project management, strategic planning, ecology, finance, and governance can make a real difference.

Connect With Us
If you're interested in being more involved, please get in touch — we'd love to chat about how your skills and passion can support the network.

A personal note from the Convenor
Thank you for everything you do. VEFN is only as strong as the people who stand behind it, and every bit of support — small or large — helps grow the impact of groups across Victoria. If you feel you can step in a little more this year, I'd love to hear from you.
— Anthony Bigelow

Thank you



To every volunteer, member group, partner and supporter — **thank you**.
Your work, passion, and commitment are what make this network real.
VEFN exists because people across Victoria show up for nature, for community, and for each other.

The year ahead holds so much promise, and I'm proud to be walking into it with you.
— Anthony Bigelow
Convenor, VEFN

Photo Credits

All images throughout this report were generously contributed by VEFN member groups and appear on their new profile pages on our website. These photos reflect the real people, places, and passion behind our movement.

VICTORIAN
ENVIRONMENT
FRIENDS
NETWORK

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