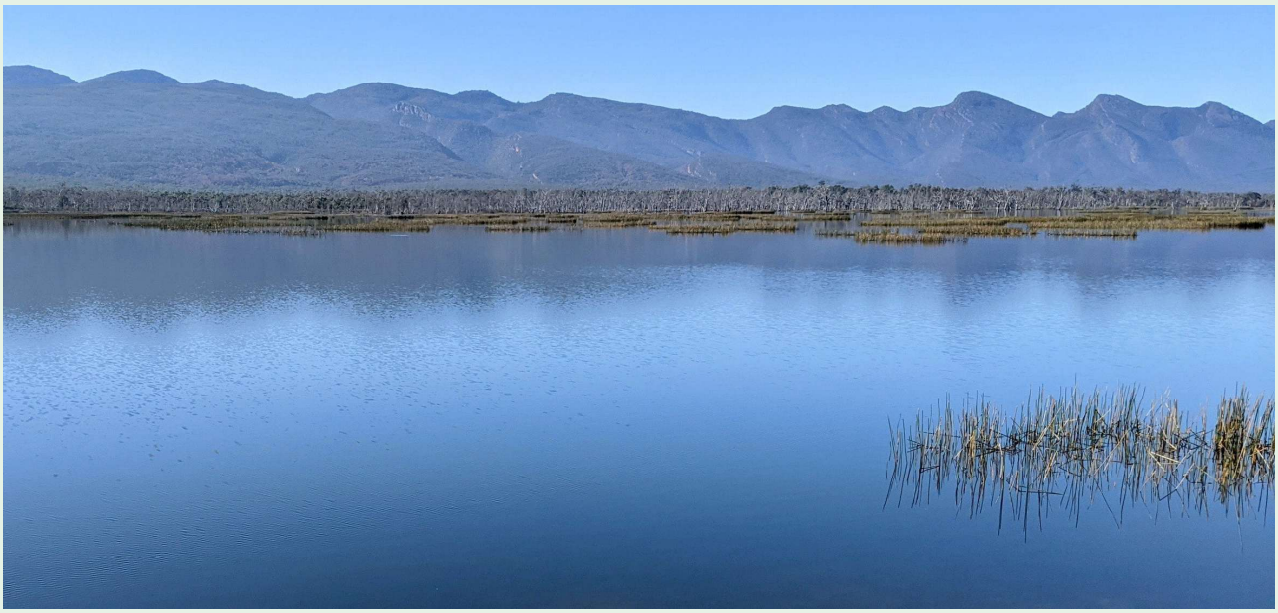
NOVEMBER 2026

2026 Annual Report

Victorian Environment Friends Network



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 2026 Achievements and Future Directions



Building on Our Foundations

The past twelve months have been another important year for the Victorian Environment Friends Network (VEFN). Following the significant achievements of 2025, our focus has shifted towards putting those foundations to work and strengthening the support we provide to Friends groups across Victoria.

A major priority has been progressing the two-year, $200,000 funding agreement with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). This funding represents an important opportunity to strengthen VEFN's capacity and provide more consistent support to our members. The appointment of two part-time staff members has been a significant step forward, allowing us to expand our communications, engagement and organisational activities.

We've also continued implementing the strategic direction established in 2025, with a focus on strengthening our network, improving member engagement and ensuring VEFN remains an effective voice for community environmental volunteers.

Throughout the year, our education activities, advocacy work, partnerships and communications have continued to develop. We've provided opportunities for members to share knowledge, learn from specialists and connect with others facing similar challenges.

One highlight was our involvement in the Parliamentary Friends of Landcare event at Parliament House in June, alongside Landcare Victoria. Opportunities like this are important in raising awareness of the contribution Friends groups make and ensuring their voices are heard.

What continues to impress me most is the dedication of volunteers across Victoria. Thousands of people give their time to restore bushland, protect waterways, monitor wildlife and care for the natural places that matter to their communities. Their commitment remains at the heart of everything VEFN does.

I sincerely thank our committee, subcommittee members, advisers and partners for their contributions throughout the year. Looking ahead, our priority is to build on this momentum, make effective use of the resources now available and ensure VEFN continues to grow as a strong, connected network supporting environmental volunteers across Victoria.

Anthony Bigelow
Convenor, Victorian Environment Friends Network



The VEFN Team



VEFN is supported by a dedicated team of committee members, advisers, subcommittee members and volunteers who contribute their time, knowledge and experience to strengthening the network. Throughout 2026, their contributions have been essential in progressing our advocacy, education, communications, partnerships and organisational development.

Committee Members – 2026:

- **Anthony Bigelow –** Convenor
- **Jessica Gerger–** Deputy Convenor
- **Ross Darling –** Treasurer
- **Margaret Hunter –** Secretary
- **Carol Challis** – Committee Member
- **Callum Clarke** - Committee Member
- **Clive Edington** - Committee Member
- **Laura Mumaw** – Committee Member
- **Dr Nadine Richings** - Committee Member
- **Jaye Williams** - Committee Member

Our Growing Team

A significant development during 2026 was the appointment of two part-time staff members through our DEECA funding agreement. These appointments mark an important step in building VEFN's capacity to support member groups and deliver our strategic priorities

Jacqui Bramwell – Project Executive Officer



Catherine Forge – Communications and Engagement Officer



Thank You

We sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to VEFN throughout the year, including our committee, subcommittees, advisers and volunteers. A special thank you to Callum Clarke and Ross Darling, who are stepping down from their roles. Both have made valuable contributions to VEFN, and we greatly appreciate the time, energy and expertise they've given to the network. Their efforts, alongside those of our wider team, have helped strengthen VEFN and position us well for the years ahead.

Our Membership



VEFN continues to strengthen its connections with conservation groups across Victoria, bringing together volunteers who care for our parks, reserves, waterways, bushland and wildlife habitats.
Our growing network provides opportunities for groups to share knowledge, collaborate on common challenges and have a stronger collective voice on issues affecting community environmental volunteering.

Key Highlights

- More than 180 conservation groups connected through the VEFN network
- Representing approximately 16,000 environmental volunteers across Victoria
- 73 paid member groups at 30 June 2026
- Membership increased to 101 paid groups during the 2026–27 financial year
- Continued improvements to membership administration and communications



What This Means for VEFN

A stronger membership base helps us better understand the needs of conservation groups, advocate on their behalf and develop services that provide practical value. As our capacity grows, we aim to strengthen engagement with existing members while encouraging more groups to become actively involved in the network.

Key Achievements

- **DEECA Funding and Organisational Growth** Progressed our two-year, $200,000 DEECA funding agreement, including the appointment of two part-time staff members to strengthen VEFN's operations, communications and member engagement.

- **Strengthening Our Membership** Continued building relationships with Friends groups across Victoria, improving membership administration and creating opportunities for greater participation in the network.

- **Advocacy and Representation** Worked to ensure the interests and contributions of Friends groups are recognised, including participation in the Parliamentary Friends of Landcare event at Parliament House in June, alongside Landcare Victoria.

- **Education and Knowledge Sharing** Delivered online educational presentations covering biodiversity along rail corridors, Melbourne's natural environment and frog monitoring, with recordings made available for members to access.

- **Communications and Engagement** Expanded our communications through newsletters, social media and member group spotlights, helping share the achievements and experiences of environmental volunteers across Victoria.

- **Building Organisational Capacity** Continued implementing our strategic priorities, strengthening internal processes and developing the resources needed to provide more consistent and practical support to member groups.



Education & Skills activity update

Sharing Knowledge and Building Skills

Throughout 2026, VEFN continued providing educational opportunities to help Friends groups build their knowledge, develop practical skills and learn from experts working in environmental conservation. Our online presentation series covered a diverse range of topics, offering members opportunities to explore new ideas and apply what they've learned to their own local environments.

2026 Presentations

Ben Roberts – Biodiversity Along Rail Corridors

Exploring the environmental value of railway corridors and their potential to support biodiversity and habitat connectivity.

Ben Cullen – Finding Melbourne's Nature

Highlighting Melbourne's natural environment and encouraging greater awareness and appreciation of the wildlife and habitats around us.

Jane Petch and David De Angelis – Frog Monitoring

Sharing insights into frog monitoring and the importance of community involvement in understanding and protecting local frog populations.

Looking Ahead

These presentations help connect our members with specialist knowledge while encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing across the network.

Recordings are available through VEFN's YouTube channel, allowing Friends groups to revisit presentations and share them with their volunteers.

We thank our presenters and everyone involved in organising and supporting the program throughout the year.



Governance & Advocacy Update

Strengthening Our Governance

As a Victorian incorporated association and registered charity, VEFN is committed to maintaining strong governance, transparency and accountability.

Throughout 2026, a significant focus has been reviewing our governance arrangements against the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Governance Standards and External Conduct Standards.

This includes developing and updating policies and procedures, improving record-keeping and strengthening the management of organisational records and digital information.

Committee members have also been encouraged to join the Institute of Community Directors Australia (ICDA) and undertake governance training, helping build knowledge and accountability across the organisation.

Advocacy & Stakeholder Engagement

VEFN continues to provide a collective voice for communities volunteering to protect and restore our natural environment. During 2025–26, the Advocacy Subcommittee focused on developing position statements and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, including DEECA, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria.

These relationships provide opportunities to raise issues affecting Friends groups and strengthen recognition of their contribution to environmental conservation.

Looking Ahead

In 2027, priorities include progressing VEFN's position statements, exploring tools to strengthen our advocacy work and continuing improvements to governance practices.

We thank Dr Nadine Richings and everyone involved in these important areas of work.



Subcommittee Highlights

Resourcing & Organisational Development

The implementation of our DEECA funding agreement has been a significant focus, supporting the appointment of two part-time staff members and increasing VEFN's capacity to deliver activities and engage with members.

Work has also continued on improving membership administration, internal processes and the resources available to support the network.

These developments are helping VEFN move towards a more sustainable operating model while maintaining the volunteer-led approach that underpins our organisation.

Communications & Digital

Throughout 2026, VEFN continued strengthening its communications to keep members informed, connected and engaged.

Our newsletters, website and social media channels have provided opportunities to share news, promote events and highlight the achievements of Friends groups across Victoria.

Member group spotlights have been an important part of this work, showcasing the diversity of environmental volunteering and recognising the people making a difference in their communities.

Partnerships & Engagement

VEFN continued developing relationships with environmental organisations, government agencies and community networks to strengthen collaboration and improve recognition of Friends groups.

Our engagement with Landcare Victoria, including the Parliamentary Friends of Landcare event in June, provided an opportunity to highlight the contribution of environmental volunteers and strengthen connections with decision-makers.

Building these relationships remains important to ensuring Friends groups have a voice in discussions affecting their work.



Financial Snapshot 2025–26

This year saw a significant change to the financial position for VEFN with the receipt of the first tranche of grant funding from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. The receipt of the grant has allowed VEFN to recruit with the comfort of financial stability and these activities have commenced in the financial year 26-27. The website development project progressed during the year and will continue to do so into the next financial year.

Key points:

- **Closing funds at 30 June 2026 $124,414.03 (2025: $30,556.20)**
- **Major investments: Continued website development $7,193 (2025: $14,807)**
- **Core income sources: DEECA Grant $100,000 (2025: nil) Membership fees $1,994.42 (2025: $1,685)**
- **Expenditure focus: Aligned with prior years with communication, digital infrastructure and engagement**

These continued investments, along with the receipt of substantial grant funding, has positioned VEFN to proceed with confidence in increasing future capacity and enable better support for Friends Groups across Victoria.

Opening Balances 1 July 2025	YTD Actual	Annual Budget
Accrued GST	$1,292.00	$0.00
Main Account	$29,138.43	$29,138.43
Gift Account	$100.00	$100.00
Debit Card	$25.77	$25.77
Total Opening Balances	**$30,556.20**	**$29,264.20**
Receipts/Incomings		
Membership Fees	$1,994.42	$1,500.00
Vic Return Funding Award	$0.00	$1,500.00
Vic Return Funding Admin	$0.00	$1,000.00
Donations	$289.96	$0.00
Melbourne Water Grants	$454.55	$500.00
Grant DELWP	$100,000.00	$0.00
Total Receipts/Incomings	**$102,738.93**	**$4,500.00**
Expenditures/Outgoings		
Operating Expenses		
Website Development	$7,193.00	$10,193.00
Strategic Plan Development	$0.00	$1,300.00
Awards	$0.00	$0.00
Vic Return Award	$0.00	$1,500.00
Admin Support	$0.00	$2,500.00
Mail Chimp	$721.43	$1,350.00
Internet Costs	$0.00	$1,000.00
Stripe	$3.14	$0.00
Zoom Costs	$0.00	$300.00
Insurance	$963.54	$900.00
Membership of VNPA	$0.00	$0.00
Promotional Material	$0.00	$0.00
Annual Meeting Costs	$0.00	$500.00
GST to be recovered/paid	$0.00	$0.00
Sundry	-$0.01	$600.00
Total Expenditures/Outgoings	**$8,881.10**	**$20,143.00**
Result	**$93,857.83**	**-$15,643.00**
Closing Balances		
Main Bank Account	$124,288.26	$13,490.01
Gift Bank Account	$100.00	$100.00
Debit Card Account	$25.77	$31.19
Total Funds	**$124,414.03**	**$13,621.20**

Building a stronger VEFN

Turning Strategy into Action

Following the strategic planning work undertaken in 2025, our focus during 2026 has been on strengthening VEFN's operations and building the capacity needed to deliver meaningful support to Friends groups across Victoria.

Investing in Our Future

The implementation of our two-year DEECA funding agreement has been a major step forward. The appointment of two part-time staff members provides additional resources to support member engagement, communications and the coordination of VEFN activities. This investment will help us move beyond relying entirely on volunteer capacity while ensuring our committee and members continue to guide the organisation's direction.

Improving How We Connect

We've continued developing our website, membership administration and communication channels to make it easier for Friends groups to stay informed, access information and participate in the network.
Our newsletters, educational presentations and member spotlights have helped strengthen connections and showcase the valuable work taking place across Victoria.

Looking Ahead

Our priority is to translate this increased capacity into practical outcomes for members, including stronger advocacy, improved resources and more opportunities for collaboration. By building a sustainable organisation, we can ensure VEFN continues to support and represent environmental volunteers well into the future.



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.

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.

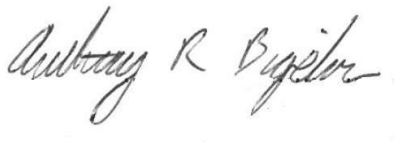
Connect With Us
If you're interested in being more involved, please get in touch — we'd love to chat about how your skills and passion can support the network.

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, committee member, partner and supporter — thank you.
Across Victoria, thousands of people continue to give their time, energy and knowledge to protect and restore the natural places we all value. Your dedication is what makes community environmental volunteering so important.
VEFN exists to support that commitment, connect the people behind it and ensure their collective voice is heard.
As we look towards 2027, I'm excited about the opportunities ahead and what we can achieve together as a stronger, more connected network.



Anthony Bigelow
Convenor, Victorian Environment Friends Network

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.