

Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.

PO Box 642, Benalla 3672

Newsletter 2 **December 2012**

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Benalla and District Environment Group Hands Over the Reins

The Benalla Sustainable Future Group (BSFG) recently approached the Benalla and District Environment Group (BDEG) regarding BSFG's intention to become an incorporated body. One of the options was a name change, that of BDEG to BSFG – this also happened to be the cheapest and the simplest way for incorporation to occur. A special meeting was called on August 22nd inviting Benalla and District Environment Group members to vote on a motion that (to paraphrase) 'BDEG should pass its incorporation over to the Benalla Sustainable Future Group', and in effect, act as a sub-group of BSFG (filling the environmental/biodiversity advocacy etc. role). This was discussed at the special meeting and then passed unanimously. In short, the Benalla and District Environment Group - in name at least – no longer exists.

Since its inception, I think it is fair to say, Benalla Sustainable Future Group has seen an increased number of the folk of Benalla and surrounds embracing, and actively living, tenets of sustainable living, which is great to see.

A number of us in BDEG have particularly had a nature conservation focus at the local level, and it is intended that this can be a focus of a sub-group of BSFG. There's a lot to be proud of regarding the work and results BDEG achieved from its inception in 1995. Also we should need no reminding that it was Benalla and District Environment Group that gave birth to Benalla Sustainable Future Group!

May I take this opportunity to thank everyone who was involved in making BDEG work, particularly the hard-working committee members, treasurers, secretaries and presidents over those years.

I wish Benalla Sustainable Future Group, and all who sail in her, all the very best and all strength in the process of spreading the good word about living within our environmental means.

Lance Williams

Immediate Past President,

Benalla and District Environment Group

President's Column

Incorporation

Benalla Sustainable Future Group has recently become an incorporated association. As Lance Williams has explained above, this was achieved by Benalla and District Environment Group (BDEG), an incorporated association, agreeing to change its name to Benalla Sustainable Future Group. This occurred at a special meeting of BDEG members held during August.

As Lance has also reminded us BDEG organised the Sustainability Forum that led to the formation of Benalla Sustainable Future Group (BSFG), and then acted as the sponsoring organisation for the fledgling BSFG, including the provision of financial support. On behalf of BSFG I thank BDEG for their initiative and support. I would also like to congratulate former members and office bearers of Benalla and District Environment Group for all they achieved over seventeen years of operation, from 1995 to 2012.

It is no surprise to find that the aims and objectives of the (former) BDEG are very similar to the Statement of Purpose for BSFG, as the underlying principle of both organisations was/is a concern for the environment at both local and national levels.

Although BDEG may no longer exist, that does not mean that environmental issues will be neglected, as BSFG plans to establish an Environmental Advocacy Action Group which will continue to monitor and respond to environmental issues.

With this in mind I would encourage former members of BDEG (many of whom expressed a desire to be kept informed about BSFG) to become members of Benalla Sustainable Future Group and thus continue their support of a local group with an environmental focus.

Membership Renewals

Membership renewals are now due (see attached form) and I would encourage many of the people who receive this newsletter to become a financial member of Benalla Sustainable Future Group so that we can continue to provide a valuable role in the community through:

- Conducting regular meetings and providing the opportunity to hear guest speakers.
- Establishing action groups to achieve some of our objectives.
- Acting as an advocate for sustainability/ environmental issues with state and federal politicians and Benalla Council.
- Networking with other like-minded organisations.

Please remember that the strength of an organisation depends on its membership base to provide the people and the necessary finances to run the organisation. Membership fees are \$20 per household.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a very happy and safe Christmas and New Year and no doubt you would join with me in my wish for more positive news on the environmental and climate front in 2013.

John Lloyd
BSFG President



Environmental Advocacy

Benalla Sustainable Future Group is keen to establish an Environmental Advocacy Action Group to continue the focus on environmental issues of the former Benalla and District Environment Group. I believe this fits well with our Statement of Purpose as the many issues that BSFG focuses on arise from a concern for the natural environment. I also believe it is important that this role is not neglected with the change in name (and status) for BDEG.

There are very many important environmental issues that are demanding attention at the moment, not the least of which is the 'winding back' of environmental protection by the State Government. Since the Baillieu Government came into power our environment has been under attack and the hit list keeps growing. The following summary of policy reversals comes from Environment Victoria's 'Reclaim Victoria's Environment' campaign.

So far the Baillieu Government has:

- *Scrapped plans to cut Victoria's greenhouse pollution*
- *Made solar power more expensive for Victorian families*
- *Supported polluting coal while destroying investment and jobs in wind and solar energy*
- *Reduced protection for national parks, forests and endangered species*
- *Undermined national efforts to save the Murray River*
- *Announced plans to dig up Victorian farmland for brown coal mega-mines*
- *Attempted to return cattle grazing to the Alpine National Park under the guise of scientific research*
- *Weakened planning rules around sea level rise designed to reduce the impacts of climate change*
- *Opposed the creation of any marine protected areas*

For more information on this campaign go to: www.environmentvictoria.org.au/emergency

And the latest news is the Baillieu Government's plans for 'scientific logging' of river red gums in Barmah National Park. One would have to view this with scepticism after their 'scientific cattle grazing' in the high country.

As well as these Victorian issues there are many other environmental issues of concern right now. These include maintaining and enhancing bio-diversity, the Murray Darling Basin Plan and other water issues, coal seam gas, marine reserves, protecting the Great Barrier Reef, logging in native forests plus the many issues to do with climate change.

I am certain there are many people amongst our readership who are concerned about some or all of these issues. I would hope a number of you feel strongly enough to form an Environmental Advocacy Action Group and play a part in advocating for the environment.

What would this entail? That would depend on the people involved but there are a range of actions that could be undertaken such as responding to petitions, etc. from the internet, writing emails or letters to local council, state and federal politicians, writing letters to newspapers, being part of a deputation to local councillors and/ or senior council staff or to our local politicians, preparing submissions etc. There are a number of organisations such as Environment Victoria, Friends of the Earth, Quit Coal, etc. who will readily include the group on their email list and provide regular updates. I think such a group could largely correspond through emails without the need for many meetings.

So, the challenge is over to you. Who is prepared to become involved, or even talk about becoming involved, in such a venture? Complete the section at the bottom of the membership form, or send me an email, informing me of your willingness to consider becoming part of such a group and also letting me know of the environmental issues you are really concerned about. Once I have a list of people I will arrange for contact between everybody.

John Lloyd

Bulk Food Co-op

We continue to have a around 50 members. There are a few who dropped their membership in the first half of this year but there is a steady stream of new members. An important aspect of the membership, is that those that are current members, are committed to the aims of the bulk food action group. Last open day was the busiest day we have had at bulk foods, well over double the sales compared to the same time last year. It seems people are happy with the products and with our prices.

A reminder of our aims:

- to encourage the responsible use of our earth's resources
- to reduce packaging and excessive handling of food
- to support Australian growers and local producers where possible
 - to reduce food miles
 - to reduce food costs
- to allow people choice about the products they buy and to have knowledge of where the products are sourced

The products we stock, are dry, non-perishable foods such as flour, cereals, sugar, legumes, dried fruits and nuts etc. Members are encouraged to bring their own containers for food items and purchase enough product to last them the month.

Open Dates and Times for 2013

The sale of food items will occur once per month and alternate between the 4th Monday and 4th Saturday (Benalla market day) in the month. You can purchase any time between the designated times.

January	Saturday	26 th	10 am -12 pm
February	Monday	25 th	4 pm - 6 pm
March	Saturday	23 rd	10 am -12 pm

We are always on the lookout for local produce, keeping in mind that it must be non-perishable to meet our food health and safety guidelines and registration with Benalla Rural City.

Each year I have to apply for a renewal of registration of food premises and we are then issued with a Class 3 Registration Certificate. Records from where we purchase products etc. are documented. This documentation is available for anyone to view.

Through demand and popularity our product list has grown to over 60 items. If there is not a high demand for a product it may be deleted from our stock, as we have limited storage.

From now on, on each of our open days, we will have a nominated 'duty manager'. We are grateful for those who have offered to do this and they are currently being trained. Once this has taken place, a roster will be made up and these volunteers will oversee the running of the bulk food purchases on the open days, welcome new members, take responsibility for opening and locking cupboards and doors etc. It will be wonderful to have some help in this way.

Christine Holmes
Bulk Food Co-op Coordinator

Plastic Bag Free Benalla

A small steering committee has convened to plan a course of action, hopefully to take Benalla into the future as a 'plastic bag free' city.

We have had one meeting with representatives from BSFG, Benalla Rural City, and community groups; unfortunately the meeting time was not conducive to business people attending. The meeting was quite supportive of the idea, and proposed that business people could be surveyed as to their attitudes towards replacing plastic bags with more environmentally friendly alternatives (such as corn starch bags – for supermarket type applications, hessian, string, or calico bags - all made from natural fibres). This survey will take place early in 2013 as part of the Benalla economic development and tourism department's plan to assist businesses growth.

In the interim period, we believe that we should continue to educate the public as to the negative impacts on our environment that our dependence on plastic bags is causing. We have already had a small display at the BSFG Benalla Festival 'A Day in the Gardens' stall (see photo below), and will write letters to the editor in the Benalla Ensign alerting readers to the better alternatives available.

Anecdotally, there are a number of Benalla business proprietors who have already taken steps to eliminate plastic bags, or who are willing to look into the alternatives available, so this is a heartening sign.

If anyone would like to be involved in this BSFG action, please contact Peter Holmes (contacts on page 1).

The following article appeared in the 'Bali Advertiser' in June this year:

If Rwanda can do it!

Yep, Rwanda has a complete ban on plastic bags! They cannot be used, manufactured, imported or sold. FULL STOP. So many positives! Firstly Rwanda is clean, agricultural soil is free from litter allowing water to penetrate, there is less flooding from blocked drains, there are no toxic fumes from burn offs, and cottage industries have been born to provide alternatives to plastic bags. So how does a developing country manage to be so far ahead of the rest of the world?

...**committed leaders!**

Hopefully Benalla can follow Rwanda's lead!
Peter Holmes



Retrofit of the Old Benalla Post Office into a Council Office

The current Civic Centre in Benalla is going to be converted into the Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Learning Centre which includes a library and many other services.

The Civic Centre staff will be relocated into a retrofit of the old Benalla Post Office building and the old heritage listed original shire offices next door. This provides a rare opportunity to incorporate a food garden and other environmental initiatives into the site redevelopments. Modern offices all around the world now have access to staff tended food gardens. Some of these gardens are on the roof of multi storey buildings if space is at a premium and these are even improving the heat proofing of the building to reduce air conditioning costs. Modern communities also have access to community gardens to share the responsibilities and fun of growing food together.

There are numerous obvious nutritional, exercise, social, communication and problem solving that comes with the relaxation and peace available in gardens. Less obvious though is the fact people in hospitals with access to vegetation natural outlooks get better sooner according to numerous medical studies. It gives staff something to do at morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea time rather than trying to push into another overcrowded tea room.

On the continuum of options available the Council Civic Centre is currently at the level 1 of least benefit and in fact we will move backwards, losing the numerous beneficial views of water, landscape and vegetation available in our current offices:

1. Ornamental desktop plants tended by cleaners.
2. Small vegetable plants in pots outside tended by willing staff.
3. Large fruit tree pot and vegetable pots outside tended by willing staff.
4. Small vegetable garden bed in the rear compound tended by willing staff.
5. Plant out the existing west street side garden beds to be tended by willing staff.
6. To be tended by willing staff and other staff from other businesses.
7. To be tended by willing staff, other staff from other businesses and the wider community.

Most thriving healthy communities now have active community gardens.

The type of edible plants would probably depend on what security precautions were available and working out if they are needed. At the moment the garden beds are either dead and barren or growing declared weeds. See photos at right.

If given the go ahead for option 5 upwards then willing staff could start making preparations now and have something established in weeks without parks and gardens staff having to tend to these gardens. Some fresh soil may be warranted but a corporate compost bin and worm farm could also be fired up to convert our food scraps and divert them from landfill. It would be good if we could water from a building water tank if this became available during the building retrofit.

The plants here would help cool the building and benefit from the thermal mass at night. Formal gardens could still be maintained by parks and gardens staff along the south bridge street frontage of the building because this will be short of light most of the year. In the event you lost staff or community interested in maintaining the productive garden then all or part of it can easily be reverted back to parks and gardens control and switch back to ornamental.

It is a chance to demonstrate some culture change and environmental practices and staff health practice change as well. The post office building retrofit project control group has already identified the removal of asbestos and the replacement of the many old inefficient heating and cooling systems as a priority. If you or anyone else in the Benalla Sustainable Future Group have any other ideas about how the old post office could be used to demonstrate steps towards a sustainable future then please let me know. Maybe this could be part of the workshop we run at our next meeting in 2013.

Callum Morrison
Environmental Health Coordinator
Benalla Rural City Council





This year's 'A Day in the Gardens' was rated 'Best Ever' and the excellent weather helped. The BSFG stall was kept busy for most of the morning with a variety of reading material collected by passers by.

BSFG members also did their bit to help the community by volunteering for very early morning duty to direct stall holders to their sites.

We also did our bit of lobbying with the coffee vendors to use compostable cups. Some more recycling bins would help. Check out their availability next time you stop at a van.



Tanberg, The Age, 22/5/2012

**Next meeting of the
Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.
Thursday 28th January 2012
Uniting Church Hall, Carrier Street, Benalla**

BENALLA SUSTAINABLE FUTURE GROUP INC. - Membership Form

Name(s) _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Areas of Particular Interest _____

Please note: email is our preferred form of communication and your privacy will be respected.

One year membership of Benalla Sustainable Future Group (BSFG) is \$20 per household

Please make cheques payable to Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.

Please complete membership form, including membership subscription, and post to:

Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.

PO Box 642

Benalla, 3672

Environmental Advocacy Action Group

Name(s) _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Environmental Issues of Particular Interest _____

Please note: email is our preferred form of communication and your privacy will be respected.