

Submission Cover Sheet

Friends of Edithvale Seaford Wetlands Incorporated

Victorian Parliament Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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Presenter:

Margaret Hunter Secretary Friends of Edithvale Seaford Wetlands Incorporated

FRIENDS OF EDITHVALE-SEAFORD WETLANDS INCORPORATED



Association Number A0017388A

ABN 95 886 101 621

1. The Friends of Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands Incorporated, was established in 1988 remains the value holder of the wetlands on behalf of the community. Since its foundation, from the earlier work of the Wetlands Watch and other groups, the group has worked in a voluntary capacity to preserve and protect the wetlands. Our active volunteer roles include the following:
 - Supervision of the Education Centre and the Bird Hide at Edithvale. Our volunteers attend during opening times ie 1pm to 5pm Saturdays and Sundays from August to March whilst the water is there. We regularly host bird watching enthusiasts and other interest groups.
 - Tree planting at Seaford and Edithvale. FESWI presently runs a planting and weeding working bee in the Seaford Wetlands buffer zone on the first Sunday of each (planting) month. Over the years in both sites, FESWI has planted out tens of thousands of trees and under-storey plants.
 - Education – Over 13 times a year FESWI conducts walks for schools and other groups around the wetlands, with school groups and other groups, some in conjunction with Melbourne Water. In the 1990's, FESWI produced a teaching resource about the wetlands – *The Oasis Next Door* – both in book and CD form which was made available to schools at a nominal price
 - Publicity and promotion. We participate in events including the celebration of World Wetlands Day and Summer by the Sea has a presence at community functions eg *Summer by the Sea*; *World Wetlands Day* and more recently *Love Where You Live*. Every few years it holds a major 'Open Day' type activity in which it invites other environmental organisations to participate.
 - The Wetland Study Group. This offers our members different means of active involvement – looking at life in the waters, The results are made available to our members and the general public via displays in the hide, Facebook, newsletter, and the website and displays in community houses, libraries etc.
 - Fundraising. The group funds its activities in various ways: membership fees, donations, grants from both Councils and Melbourne Water; larger grants from other sources eg *Coast Care*, the *Stronger Communities Grant Program of the Commonwealth*; We hold occasional Sausage Sizzles. The committee is always active in seeking grants where available the work we do.

- Managing a website and a Facebook page which enables our visitors to share their experiences and wonderful photographs that document the birdlife on the water, and importantly the muddy edges that the migratory waders inhabit, to the public, and in particular, a global community of birdwatching enthusiasts.
 - Producing newsletter bi-monthly newsletter to disseminate information to our members, local schools, city councillors and Melbourne Water.
 - Public advocacy. As a legitimate community voice we have had considerable success in putting forward information, ideas and concerns from our group and the connected wider community eg submissions to Environmental Effects Statement (EES) hearings where risks to the wetlands are identified eg Level Crossings Removal and Mordialloc Freeway inquiries.
 - Active engagement in local council issues regarding proposals for inappropriate encroachment of housing development We keep a watching brief on development close to the wetlands, and have in the recent past opposed three proposed housing developments – two successfully.
 - Publicity and promotion. A short DVD about the Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands is currently in production for distribution to schools, community groups councillors etc.
 - FESWI is represented on several committees including:- Frankston Environmental Friends Network, Kingston Environment Committee, Port Phillip Conservation Council
2. Representation (two representatives) to Community Liaison Committee which Melbourne Water leads. This group was established in 2004 to provide a vital direct public input. It is chaired by the Melbourne Water site manager. The committee consists of Kingston Council, Frankston Council, Friends of Edithvale Seaford Wetlands, Birdlife Australia, MW operations and educational staff and Seaford Community Group. The committee meets every 3 months and provides a great opportunity for the Friends group to raise any issues and for Melbourne Water to communicate what is happening on the ground. FESWI is well supported by Melbourne Water which follows up on any queries and requests.
 3. The Bird Hide was successfully reopened in 2016 with many visitors, a highlight of our volunteer activities outlined above. We were also successful in being recognised as the Kingston Community Group of the Year in January 2018. A proud achievement of 31 years service to the community that continues today.
 4. Other projects have included buffer zone revegetation at Edithvale and Seaford, strategy planning and community involvement with schools – in 2019 at St Louis De Montfort Primary School in Aspendale and the sponsorship of memberships for the School Environment Captains over several years.

5. External committee involvement includes the Frankston Environment Friends Network (over 20 years), Kingston Public Spaces and Environment Committee, Port Phillip Conservation Council, Edithvale/Bonbeach Level Crossing Removal Authority, and since 2004, the Melbourne Water Community Liaison Committee for the Edithvale Seaford Wetlands.
6. Our membership is stable and growing, with a happy enthusiastic group of volunteers, the lifeblood and heart of our activities. Our membership base and supporters number around 120 groups and individuals with on going community support in addition to this.
7. In summary, the Friends have grown and matured as an environment group active in both Kingston and Frankston council areas over the last 30 years and this will continue into the future with renewed interest and involvement in the Edithvale Seaford Wetlands, one of 12 in Victoria. Our future plans are active and forward looking with an expansion of our activities in several areas.

Section 2 Ramsar Status Information Sheet

1. The Friends of Edithvale Seaford Wetlands have reviewed the Ramsar Status Fact Sheet as required and state that it is an accurate statement of the information relating to the Edithvale Seaford Wetlands
2. I note that there is several options for bird watching in this area including the Melbourne Water Education Centre, viewing platforms, the surrounding buffer zones areas, and the Bird Hide that is opened by the Friends group.
3. The Bird Hide at Edithvale is a very popular destination for the local and wider community, with recordings of avian visitors, a visitor display, and a team of passionate and interested volunteers who are always happy to come along and experience the birdlife and community enjoyment of this important asset in the community.
4. We have received ongoing funding from the Stronger Communities program to the value of \$7,250.00 to maintain the hide since its opening. We are appreciative to the MHR for Isaacs Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP, and the State Member for Mordialloc, Tim Richardson MLA, Melbourne Water and Dandenong Valley Authority officers in the last 31 years.

5. We have been asked to present in December 2018 to a group of Ramsar Land Managers and agencies with a presentation on our work, and a tour of the Edithvale/Seaford Wetlands which was very well received by the group. Range of group visits to the Hide/Tour program from seniors to school groups, to retired engineers. An important part of our education program to all levels of the community and specialist land manager officers

Section 3 Ramsar Related Comments

1. The monitoring, evaluation, reporting and implementation (MERI) site plan for Edithvale and Seaford was endorsed by the committee in August 2018, and the actions from that align with the Edithvale Seaford Ramsar Management Plan. It is a useful overview of the framework developed to protect and maintain the values at Edithvale and Seaford wetlands.
2. In conclusion, our group is satisfied with the MERI process that has been put in place for Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands as it provides a continuing avenue for FESWI's voice. When it comes to the future outlook for this Ramsar site, with integrity, respect for nature and real foresight, the viability of the site's ecology, especially in regard to the birdlife, will be in safe hands.

Section 4 Threats and Opportunities

1. The Friends see the issue as one that will require ongoing investigation.

Friends of Edithvale Seaford Wetlands position on Ramsar Obligations and Closing Statement

1. FESWI has a high level of involvement with Melbourne Water over 20 years, with committee involvement over this time. We are consulted on each Ramsar Plan, other projects and welcomed at Melbourne Water events including the recent Healthy Waterways Strategy on 27 November at Carrum.
2. Seen as a valued and respected community group with knowledge of the wetlands.
3. Professional and skilled volunteer group, part of wider community network in the Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands and committed to engagement with Melbourne Water and their officers.
4. Working to maintain information and awareness of the Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands by transference of knowledge to future Friends' members, part of the recent FESWI Strategy Planning Seminar held in September 2019.
5. FESWI look forward to continued involvement in this area, with Melbourne Water, Councils and the local community network in a collaborative partnership.
6. The presentation will build on and enhance this submission

