

Northern Grampians Shire Council

Walkers Lake Advisory Group Meeting Minutes

The scheduled meeting **8 February 2023** held at 6.00 pm online via Teams.

Chair: Cr Kevin Erwin

Attendees: Cr Kevin Erwin, Haviva Perkal, Carol Campbell, Tony Hand, Tony Dark (NGSC)

We would like to acknowledgement Dja Dja Wurrung the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet. Pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging

Apologies: Chad Frost, Mark Costello (Dja Dja Wurrung), Austin Freeman, Steve Jesse, Rob Loats, Russell Steel, Debra Meagher, Andrew Borg, David Hwang (NGSC),

Apologies accepted and no Motion moved

1. **Previous meeting minutes:** Minutes of meeting 31 August 2022 True and correct **Moved** Haviva Perkal and Seconded Carole Campbell
2. **Business arising from the previous meeting:** Any items discussed in general business

Action item from last meeting: List of projects for submission sent to Mark and LUAA team for review

3. **General Business:**

| Item | Topic | Discussion | Action/ Outcome |
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| 1.1 | Environmental and Heritage Management Advice | Moved: Cr Kevin Erwin Seconded: Cr Eddy Ostarcevic The endorsement has progressed to the implementation of the action plan which is meeting item 1.2. | Carried 2022 with Action: Tony to send a copy to all members |

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| 1.2 | Walkers Lake Management Action Plan | <p>Agreement with Dja Dja Wurrung - Tony Dark advised that following discussions with Dja Dja Wurrung we are aligning any activities to the Land Use Activity Agreement (LUAA) formed between the State Government and Dja Dja Wurrung. This Agreement relates to certain areas of public land within Victoria and categorises certain activities that can occur on this public land as Advisory or Routine Activities. The basic rules were discussed in that routine works can be completed as a normal course of business and advisory require consent from DDW. Tony Dark advised that all works will be channelled through DDW for confirmation whether it is either type.</p> <p>Rules Signage – Discussed the rules content and that it is a priority for finalisation and installation for visitors. The sign details were circulated to the group via email and there were suggested changes to make sure we covered all aspects of what we were attempting to communicate. We discussed the heading whether it was Rules or Information so Tony Dark will send a couple of versions to the group to agree to. Tony Hand suggested we group the information in specific areas such as boating, camping etc. so this will be completed. Also discussed to include “be respectful of the environment and cultural heritage values” so this will be included in the new draft. The next step will be sign off from the group and then seek DDW input and signoff on context and then permits for installation.</p> <p>The group briefly looked at the signage relating to Recreation, Biodiversity and Cultural however this will require more in depth review and input particularly from Dja Dja Wurrung to ensure we capture all historical and significant messaging.</p> <p>Flyer update – The flyer was distributed to the group via email and meeting feedback suggested include firewood reference to plan your trip section. Include poor mobile phone reception for some providers, include more cultural heritage reference, swap item 4 with item 7 to align with purposes and update the fire section to include Catastrophic. The group was happy with the design and the messaging it delivers. Tony Dark will organise for the redraft from NGSC media and Communications person before resharing with the whole group.</p> | <p>Action:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tony Dark to circulate the new draft versions of the rules before next steps with DDW. 2. Tony Dark to resubmit flyer for feedback and signoff by the group. 3. Tony Dark to circulate the protection zone map and overview to the group for feedback and sign off. 4. Tony Dark to contact DDW for consent to implement |

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| | <p>Projects Discussed that All projects are itemised on a spreadsheet that was circulated to the group. These works are time lined on a current understanding of when they will be planned for completion however it was stressed that these could change depending on consent, quotes, contractor availability and resourcing.</p> <p>Protection zones - Treatment or protection of specific zones throughout parts of the reserve were discussed. These zones are to manage vehicle access particularly from areas that have vulnerable or endangered flora. The important part is to keep vehicle from entering these areas however allow pedestrian access and the inclusion of signage that may display information about the particular species of flora. The group discussed fencing (farm ringlock type) vs bollards (treated pine). Whilst fencing is effective it can be over restrictive however bollards may fit better with the Walkers Lake setting. There are 4 zones identified including zone 1 near the entrance, zone 2 on the lunette, zone 3 on the south eastern extreme of the reserve and zone 4 on the southern side of the sugar gums. A map was displayed and there was a consensus that bollards would be a better fit however the whole group needs input. Bollards may also be a better option considering the proposed controlled burns. The attendees agreed to the proposal and Tony Dark to circulate the map and ideas to the whole group for feedback. Once agreed then consent will be obtained from DDW prior to progressing to implementation.</p> <p>Regeneration works and erosion controls – Two areas were discussed for regeneration work and erosion control. The first is the camp site opposite boat ramp (eastern side) where vehicles are driven over the lunette and the second is the south-eastern end where a track diversion diversion (there is already a high track open so it is just the removal of the lower track access of about 50m) is required to allow recovery of the area. The attendees agreed to the proposals and Tony Dark is to circulate to the group for approval prior to progressing with permits and discussions with DDW. Council has already had on site discussions with Djandac (a commercial arm of DDW) who will be involved in some of the works/advice. The proposed erosion controls for the old boat ramp area will be discussed at the next meeting.</p> | <p>burrow ripping as well as fumigation for rabbit control</p> <p>5. Tony Dark to organise road closure signs</p> |
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| | | <p>Pest management – Discussed the increased numbers of rabbits on site and although fumigation has been completed in recent years there is a need to reconsider the options for managing rabbits. It was agreed by the group that a combination of fumigation and rabbit fumigation and burrow ripping however DDW will need to be involved in the decision process for this invasive action. Tony Dark to discuss with DDW and apply for consent to implement burrow ripping this season.</p> <p>Weed management - Discussed that weed mapping has taken place however the high water levels are restricting any action to be taken at this stage. The works plan will be delivered as soon as practicable and some of the Landmate (Prison Crew) may undertake removal of scotch thistle we will look at external contractors including Djandac to remove other types including manual, chemical and mechanical removal to make sure we are effective.</p> <p>Tracks – The current state of the access was discussed with high water levels there is restricted access however when the water recedes there will be a real issue for boggy tracks and vehicle moving off tracks to get around the lake. Signs will need to be installed to direct traffic and also track maintenance will need to be implemented to ensure vehicle access is kept to the formed tracks. This will need to be discussed as an ongoing concern and Tony Dark is to arrange for road closure signs to be installed as required.</p> | |
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2. Other items discussed:

Blue Green Algae – There is an outbreak so Tony Dark has installed signs and it is on social media to warn visitors.

Slashing was completed recently however Landcare have noticed that the Northern track has been over slashed so they have requested this be managed in future and keep to the plan/map.

Carole had some Questions/Concerns:

- The fenced area on the north west is being accessed for wood. Fence is in poor condition Walkers road/lane needs to be reviewed for access. Discussed that visitors may not think this is a part of the reserve so signs will need to be considered to help control.
- large amount of toilet paper on ground where campers have defecated Australia Day on the north/eastern side. Discussed this as a concern and because of the high water levels and restricted track access this may have been a deterrent for people to use the designated toilet.
- Who clean up after free campers? - Tony Dark explained that he is the only staff member available and he cleans the toilet monthly as well as his monthly checklist of checking water levels, rubbish and photos of status of the lake. Discussed that signage is the first option and whilst there is signage it is small and may not be read.
- Were porta Loos provided Aus. Day? - No porta toilets were installed for this weekend.
- Are campers counted busy periods? - Visitors are counted when Tony completes his monthly check and when the community advises him of how many were there for weekends etc.
- **Day visitor area has been on the agenda for a long time and this is to be discussed at the next meeting**

Letter from Prue McAllister (sent to the group via email 8/2) with questions on water quality and actions at the lake was discussed and in general terms the group discussed the content and Tony Dark will respond. The content is as follows:

The Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group has grave concerns regarding the management of Walkers Lake. However we recognise the work involved so highlight just two that we would like raised at your next meeting.

Water Quality

Over the past few years we seem to have seen an increasing number of cases of blue green algae at Walkers Lake and on one occasion it resulted in a major fish kill event. Not only is this disturbing for the wildlife it supports, but it impacts on the recreational use by both locals and visitors to the area.

Prior to permanent water being allocated to the lake in 2014, the water levels of the lake fluctuated with seasonal conditions. There were cases of blue green algae recorded, but certainly not as frequently as the current outbreaks.

I have attached an extract from the NCCMA in Jan 2019 regarding the need for fluctuating water levels to maintain water quality and the sustainable health of wetlands. It refers to Richardson's Lagoon, on the Murray River near Echuca, but the science is relevant to Walkers Lake. I urge you to take the time to read it. The Flora Assessment by Blue Devil Consulting in 2019 also addressed the need for fluctuating

water levels to retain the unique flora that currently exists around the lake including the old redgums and box trees that give the lake its character and appeal.

I understand that consistent higher water levels allow the amount of water required to top up the lake for the summer season to be minimised, thus reducing the cost to the council for water. It also allows for annual fish stocking by VR Fish and for consistent recreational use.

However the environmental cost of maintaining these levels needs to be considered. A toxic lake is of no value to anyone.

The Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group would like the WLAG to seek advice from the NCCMA regarding the possible benefits of varying the water levels, including intermittent drying of Walkers Lake, to allow the natural functions of this ecosystem to be maintained.

Actions

An ongoing concern of the Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group is the lack of action on the Action Plans that are part of the Management Plans that are regularly rolled out over the years. Very little has changed, except the dates for actions to be completed.

It seems that any actions that do occur are focused on visitor experience, often at the cost of the environment.

The Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group would like to know what is preventing the Council from implementing the Management Plan Actions that protect the environmental and cultural values of the Management Plan?

Prue McAllister

Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group

Action: Tony Dark will respond and advise that he will contact NCCMA to discuss the water levels, provide feedback on the proposed action plan as agreed to by the Walkers lake Advisory group, confirm that the lake is a recreation facility with a minimal water level of 1.5m being safe for recreation use and Council is working closely with the Advisory Group and DDW for advice on the management of this reserve and all values represented.

3. Close: 7.40pm

4. Next Meeting: 22 March 2023 – Prior to Easter