



WHO ARE THE 'FRIENDS OF THE FORGOTTEN WOODLANDS INC.?'

STORY BY GRAHAM ARKINSTALL

EARLY DEMAND FOR TIMBER, FIREWOOD, ROAD AND RAIL DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS THE GRAZING AND CROPPING OF LAND MEANT THAT BY THE EARLY 1900'S MUCH OF THE VVP WAS ALMOST COMPLETELY CLEARED OF *BANKSIA MARGINATA* AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT WOODLAND SPECIES OF SHEOAK (*ALLOCASUARINA VERTICILLATA*) AND BURSARIA (*BURSARIA SPINOSA*). THIS HAS RESULTED IN ISOLATED WOODLAND FRAGMENTS ON A TRAJECTORY TO LOSS OF GENETIC DIVERSITY AND LOCAL EXTINCTION.

FRIENDS OF THE FORGOTTEN WOODLANDS (FOFW) IS A VOLUNTEER GROUP WORKING TO REBUILD THE WOODLAND COMMUNITIES OF THESE KEY SPECIES THAT WERE ONCE A KEYSTONE IN THE ECOLOGY OF THE VOLCANIC PLAINS.

Formally commenced in 2016, FoFW is a community group which includes scientists, natural resource managers, farmers and others with an interest in propagating and re-establishing the three key species. It brings together existing interest, enthusiasm and past works to build a project covering all of the VVP.

The focus of FoFW has been to collect seed and propagate from remaining remnants and establish new populations which mix their genetics, helping to overcome issues associated with inbreeding and O to changing environments. Local wildlife is also a key beneficiary of such plantings.

Over time, FoFW has built its network to work closely with a wide range of landcare groups, CMA's, private and public landowners, local governments, tertiary institutions, VicRoads, and other government agencies.

ISOLATED *BANKSIA MARGINATA* REMNANT AT TIVERTON - PHOTO BY DAMIAN COOK



MT ELEPHANT BANKSIA SEED PRODUCTION AREAS PLANTING



Currently FoFW have propagated, distributed and also shared with others the task of planting in excess of 30,000 of these three key species back into the VVP landscape from Melbourne to Byaduk. Over 130 planting sites have been used on both public and private land. Key planting sites are called Seed Production Areas. These include 500 plants of each species with 50 plants from 10 different provenances, including one from a climate matched provenance to assist with future climate proofing these species. We have 3 such SPA sites which include 500 of each of the 3 key species. Another key feature of the SPA's is the mapping of all plants through the use of GPS and GIS systems. This allows all losses to be replaced each year with the same provenance. Mapping occurs across as many other planting sites as possible - currently we have in excess of 10,000 entries mapped.

With funding from the Glenelg-Hopkins CMA and Corangamite CMA, the genetics of the remnant Banksia stands were analysed in 2018 by FoFW member Dr Adam Miller of Deakin University (Warrnambool Campus). Fellow FoFW member, Dr Steve Sinclair of Arthur Rylah Institute, has made a thorough analysis of the distribution of past and present populations. These studies show that our group is acting in the nick of time - the populations are isolated but at present retain sufficient genetic diversity to rebuild healthy and resilient populations across the VVP. FoFW have also attracted funding for other research including

drought tolerance of different banksia provenances and genetic movement within populations. Future research projects await further FoFW funding.

Our plantings will, over time, provide reliable VVP provenance seed sources for all three woodland species for future landcare activities. They will also ensure the survival of these species and existing provenances across the VVP.

The continuation of our current activities will provide additional opportunities for interested people and organisations. FoFW is always seeking information about unrecorded remnants of these key species and new planting opportunities.

NEW MEMBERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOMED TO JOIN AND HELP WITH ON GROUND WORK.

Please contact us at info@friendsoftheforgottenwoodlands.org.au if you are able to offer any assistance. Alternatively, contact Aggie Stevenson (FoFW President) on 0427 786 243 for more information.



ABOVE: FLOWERING BANKSIA CONE



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