

# Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre Inc Annual Report 2023



# YEA WETLANDS

## Summary

This has been yet another year of significant challenges for the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre due to the closure of the Yea Wetlands, for almost 9 months, because of severe flooding in October that caused significant damage to the infrastructure. This has had a direct impact on visitor numbers and income from retail, tours and school groups.

Our volunteer cohort continue to be an intrinsic element to the ongoing success of the Centre's operations and their willingness to adapt to changing circumstances is to be commended and gratefully acknowledged.

### Our Vision

To develop pride in the ***Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre*** as a unique, valuable and sustainable community asset with a distinct and memorable experience.

### Our Mission

To manage the Centre responsibly and sustainably delivering rewarding experiences for all.

### Our Programs

The Centre seeks to deliver its Vision and Mission through three programs:

1. **Visitor Information Centre**
2. **Education**
3. **Community Engagement**



## Contents

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Section One – Governance.....</b>	<b>3</b>
> Structure & Management	
> Our People	
> Chairman's Report	
<b>Section Two – Activities &amp; Achievements.....</b>	<b>7</b>
> Visitor Statistics	
> Volunteer Program	
> Educational Programs	
> Tours, Meetings & Events	
> Celebrating Indigenous Culture	
> Marketing	
<b>Section Three – Finances .....</b>	<b>11</b>
> Treasurer's Report	
> Financial Statements	
<b>Section Four – Looking to the Future.....</b>	<b>13</b>

## Section One - Governance

### Structure & Management

The YWDC and its operations is managed by an incorporated committee of volunteers, Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre Inc. Murrindindi Shire Council (MSC) is the owner of the building and funds and manages the two part time employees (1.1 FTE) who coordinate the YWDC activities. Both organisations work together in close partnership to deliver the range of services and activities on offer at the Centre. In addition to the two part time staff the YWDC is supported by an enthusiastic and dedicated team of 43 local volunteers.



### Our People

Y Water Discovery Centre Inc.	
Name	Position
Don Knight	Chair
Ian Marshman	Deputy Chair
Greg Noonan	Secretary
Don Knight	Treasurer
Frank Larkins	Grant Facilitator
Geoff Leslie	Member
David Anderson	Member
Julie Lynch	Member
Corinne Border	Member
Damian Murphy	Member
Employees	
Name	Position
Julie Blyth	Coordinator
Pauline Roberts	Visitor Services Officer

## Chair's Report 2022-2023

***The YWDC acknowledges the Waring Yilam-Bulok Clan of the Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of the Land on which the Centre operates and pay our respects to their leaders past, present and emerging.***

It is with great pleasure and significant pride to provide this report on the operations of the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

You will recall I advised the YWDC Association had been successful in applying for and been granted \$375,000 by the Victorian State Government Regional Tourism Investment Fund and administered by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, with co-funding of \$125,000 to be raised by the Association. The Grant provided funds for the renewal of exhibits in the Interpretive/Education Wing of the Centre, a Metal Sculpture Trail in the Wetlands and the installation of a 600 metre combined raised boardwalk and gravel path opening up access to the northern end of the Wetlands. Re-scoping has added six strategically placed viewing platforms providing increased visibility to the bird habitats within the wetlands.

As a result of this initiative, much of the effort of the association has been concentrated on managing the project via a Project Governance Group consisting of members of the Association and Wetlands Committee of Management, a State Govt. Project Manager, and representatives of Murrindindi Shire Council and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, meeting monthly to track progress of the three individual projects and ensure strict governance is observed managing public funds in accordance with the contract signed with the Victorian State Government.

A management model was produced breaking down the many responsibilities and installing volunteers with specific skill sets into separate management groups to develop protocols and management guidelines to successfully guide the project to completion.

The first 12 months have been concentrated on development of the initial concepts and visions into workable plans to place on the market for tenders to complete the work. Permits required were identified and sought including a cultural heritage management plan, works on waterways consent, a flora and fauna survey and Council approvals. As of writing all have been granted enabling the work to proceed with oversight by the Taungurung Land and Waters Council (TL&WC) as work proceeds in the Wetlands.

One of the major challenges was to raise the \$125,000 co-funding as per the contract agreement. Along with a significant amount contributed by the Wetlands Trust, local supporters were approached and having understood the Association's vision and commitment, very generously contributed to the fund resulting in an over subscription. On behalf of the Association, I would like to place on record our heartfelt thanks to those generous donors for supporting our vision of cementing the Yea Wetlands as a premium tourism experience whilst preserving the natural beauty for locals, visitors and future generations. Appropriate recognition in the form of a plaque acknowledging our supporters will be proudly mounted within the centre.

Whilst there are many volunteers involved in the project, I would like to recognise particularly, the work of the three sub-committee Chairs managing each element. Geoff Leslie – Wetlands, Judi Marshman – Interpretive/Education wing renewal, and Therese Bradshaw – Sculpture Trail have tirelessly led their teams to take a vision to reality. On behalf of the Executive, thank you for your efforts and we look forward to a successful completion of each element.

The project is scheduled for completion by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 however due to the impact of the October 2022 floods in the Wetlands, we were granted an extension for completion of the boardwalks and viewing platforms to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

Having reported last year that there is a plan to dissolve the Wetlands Committee of Management into the Association, several legal issues are yet to be resolved however we are hopeful of a resolution soon. This initiative will provide significant administrative support for the Friends of the Wetlands to continue their great work.

The closure of the Wetlands in October 2022 due to flood damage and the delay in re-opening until August 2023 impacted visitation to the Centre and subsequently the income derived from wetlands tours and merchandise sales. A lengthy survey process and availability of recovery resources to Council contributed to the prolonged closure. Following on from the Covid 19 lockdowns, this latest closure has had a significant effect on public perception and awareness of the tourism asset we manage. It is planned to use all resources available to re-engage with our various markets to return our foot traffic to pre Covid levels and beyond. Further details regarding the flood are within the Treasurer's report.

The interruption of Covid 19 and concentration on the RTIF project has delayed an update to our strategic plans. We are planning to update our strategic plan in the first quarter of 2024. This is likely to include items such as an exhibition of the recent history of Yea in the Interpretive Wing, updating of several audio visual elements and signage within the centre, a re-think on the customer service location within the tourist information area to provide a more workable space, updating of the information in the Rotary shelter and a solution for the kiosk.

The Association would like to pay a tribute to the work of Julie Blyth who has moved on to a new role with Murrindindi Shire Council and recognise the leadership and administrative work Julie has contributed to the Centre from prior to the official opening in 2014. Julie still retains a reporting role for the MSC staff employed at the Centre, however her day-to-day contribution has now ceased. Well done Julie and thank you. A special mention to Pauline Roberts who single handedly managed the daily operations for some 6 months whilst a replacement structure was formed following Julie's departure. Pauline worked way beyond her normal hours to ensure the centre was resourced 7 days a week and maintaining all the other responsibilities that involve the daily operation. A much-appreciated effort Pauline and we salute your commitment.

We acknowledge the most important role our Volunteers provide in assisting visitors with a broad breath of information about our town, the shire and beyond. Whilst we have lost a few vollies due to several factors, we are indebted to those who make themselves available on a regular basis and those who respond to the constant need to fill in shifts. Well done to all our support team and your friendly courteous knowledgeable service is widely recognised and adds greatly to the reputation we cherish for the Centre.

Organisations such as the YWDC could not function without the support and injection of a broad breadth of skills at the executive level. We are blessed with a diverse range of knowledge and experience and volunteers who work for the common aim of providing a significant tourism and community product in the form of the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre. My personal thanks for your support over the last 12 months, Ian Marshman, Greg Noonan, Damian Murphy, Geoff Leslie, Frank Larkins, Julie Lynch, Corinne Border and David Anderson. Your advice and fearless input make for a cohesive group all with a common agenda to enhance the YWDC experience and to maintain and develop a key attraction in the shire to the highest of standards.

The YWDC and our partners, the Wetlands Committee of Management, have endured a number of challenges over the last three years but due to the determination and resilience of all involved, the future looks very bright to deliver on our vision of “Developing Pride in the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre as a unique, valuable community asset with a distinct and memorable experience” and our mission to “Manage the Centre responsibly through our diverse range of programs”.

I wish you best wishes for the festive season and thank you for your support.

**Don Knight**  
**Chair - Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre Inc.**  
**17 November 2023**

## Section Two – Activities & Achievements

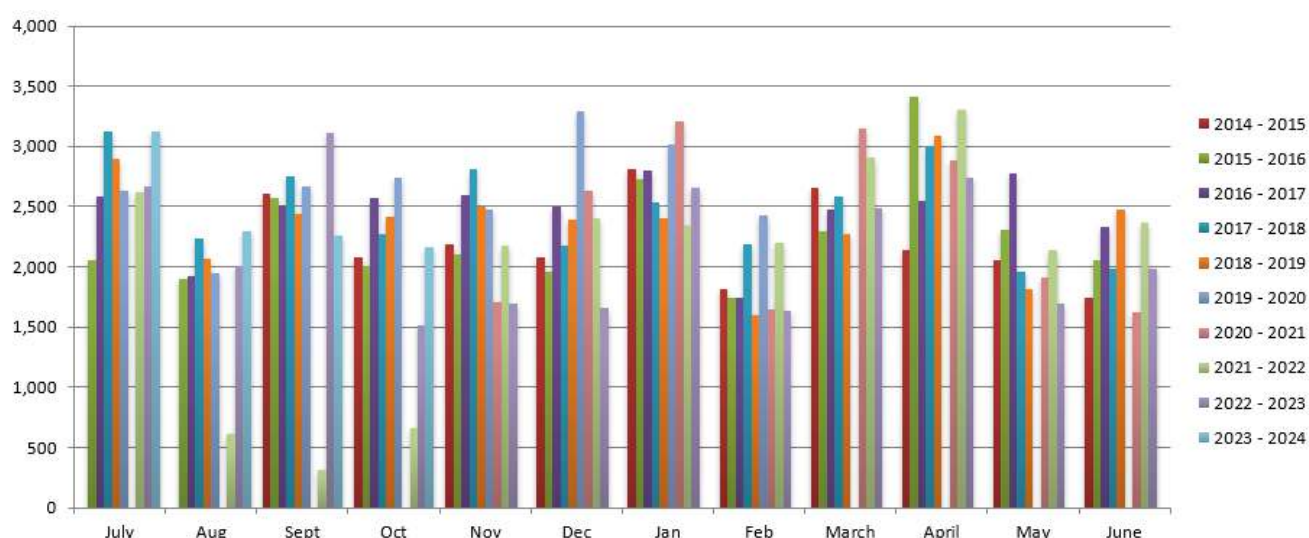
### Visitor Statistics

Whilst the Centre reopened with regular hours at the end of October 2021, unfortunately extensive flooding of the Wetlands on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 impacted the infrastructure considerably.

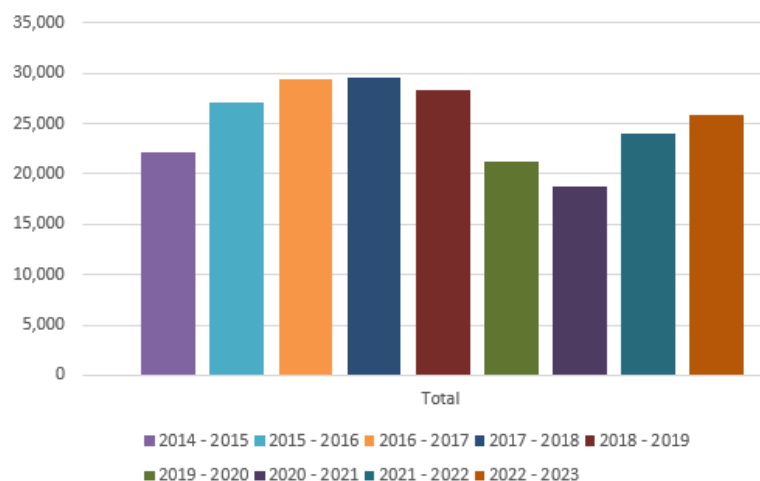
This in turn had a direct impact on visitation data as we discovered that more than a quarter of the Centre’s visitors from December to June came specifically for Wetlands visitation. Although this statistic is disappointing, it is indicative of a symbiotic relationship between the YWDC and its Wetlands. This had never been explored before and was an interesting and valuable discovery. Closure was from:

> 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023

### Monthly Visitation



### Annual Visitation



Daily visitor statistics are collected via a door counter system as well as manually by the volunteers and staff on duty. This data is reported monthly to the Victorian Tourism Industry Council (VTIC).



## Volunteer Program

The YWDC boasts a highly skilled local volunteer base of tour guides, educators and visitor services staff who are an intrinsic component of the success of the business. Visitors are assured of receiving accurate and knowledgeable tourist information from well-trained and informed volunteers. The Wetlands Tours and Schools' Programs are undertaken by a team of passionate volunteers with backgrounds in both education and environmental science.



2022 was a much better year for volunteer consistency than in the previous Covid years.

However, due to a delay in Council staff replacement, many shifts were undertaken with just one volunteer in the Centre. This is not an ideal situation and hopefully will not be a feature in the future. Whilst we have had some volunteers 'retire' we continue to attract new blood and with 6 valued additions to the cohort we continue to be incredibly grateful for everyone's dedicated and enthusiastic contribution to our local community and visitors. Such commitment has ensured that the YWDC and the wonderful Yea Wetlands are the outstanding features of our town. Currently the overall number of volunteers stands at 43.

It is still significant to note that –

- > Our retention rate of volunteers, in 2022-23, still continues to go against the Australia wide trend of the majority of volunteers not returning to any pre-COVID voluntary positions.

Training during the year was limited however an excellent Familiarisation Tour around Alexandra and Eildon occurred in May with volunteers from all the Murrindindi Visitor Information Centres invited. A great and informative day was had by all.

## 2022 Volunteer of the Year

The 2022 YWDC Volunteer of the Year award was announced as Lisa Cornwell at the end of year function in November 2022. Lisa is one of the Centre's original volunteers and has been a dedicated member of the YWDC's volunteer team, supporting the Centre as a Visitor Services' team member since 2013. She is also a talented artist and the YWDC has benefitted greatly from her expertise in this area. Congratulations and thanks are extended to Lisa and all the volunteers for the enormous contribution they make.



## Educational Programs

Once again, our educational programs were severely limited during this financial year, but this time due to the extensive flooding of the Yea Wetlands in October 2022. As a result, the Wetlands were closed which impacted any viable education programs on offer.

Any schools who did manage to visit were very appreciative of the opportunity to do so and were all returning customers, which emphasises the relevance and importance of the educational programs to their curriculum.



## Tours, Meetings & Events

Meeting room usage has increased during the year with the 'Project Ready' group of Year 10 students from Yea High School to be found there initially on Wednesday and then Friday mornings.

Unfortunately the extended closure of the Yea Wetlands detrimentally impacted the Tour program for three quarters of the year, with only nominal revenue being generated. Tours booked in prior to the flooding were rescheduled multiple times in the hope visitation would eventually be possible.

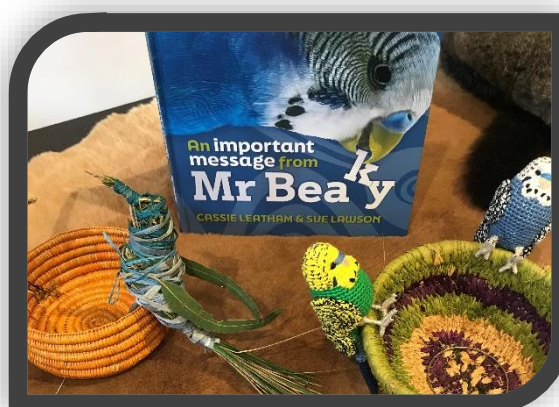


## Celebrating Indigenous Culture

NAIDOC Week was celebrated in July with various activities offered that allowed for attendees to expand their knowledge and understanding of indigenous culture. Thanks to Cassie Leatham, Francisco Almeida and Matthew Burns - CEO of Taungurung Land & Waters Council for making this possible.

Aunty Angela ten Buuren continues to generously share her culture and talents with a wider audience and this is most appreciated.

This year we were also proud to be a partner with the Taungurung Land & Waters Council wawa biik program.



## Marketing

A range of marketing activities and strategies were implemented to reflect the wide range of products and experiences on offer, and the diversity of the various target markets. Activities were restricted by closure periods however key activities for the period include:

- > Social media marketing via Facebook
- > Direct marketing campaigns to schools, service clubs and special interest groups
- > Advertising and media release in local newspapers and community publications
- > Advertising in local and regional publications
- > Posters and flyers
- > Promotion via Discover Dindi platforms
- > Launch of the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre Visitor Guide

## Section Three – Finances

### Treasurer's Report

The financial performance year ending June 2023 was once again impacted by an event out of control of the Association. A "once in a 100-year rain event" in October, inundated the Yea Wetlands to the extent that water flowed through the lower area of the Centre's indigenous garden and through the northern carpark. The Wetlands were closed to the public with water receding several months later revealing damage to a small section of boardwalk and damage to several bridges caused by falling trees swept up by the current. Recent plantings were lost and several never seen before invasive weed species were deposited throughout the area.

Access for maintenance and recovery works was delayed by the conditions and funds being made available to Murrindindi Shire Council resulting in the wetlands proper not re-opening until August 2023.

The resultant closure for 10 months had a significant impact on tourist traffic to Yea and in particular to the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre. The level of disappointed visitors was quite profound and confirmed how much the Centre and the Wetlands depend on each other for tourist traffic, not to mention the visitation by locals.

The drop in revenue over last year on the back of a covid impact in 2021/2022, resulted in a small surplus due to a better margin on merchandise sales and keeping costs under control. The challenge ahead will be to build on this result through attracting an increase on pre-covid visitation numbers and maximising returns for effort to provide surplus funds to continue the work of replacement of operational assets.

The YWDC appointed an accounting business to provide professional bookkeeping services for which we pay an hourly fee. Switching to the accounting platform Xero has provided much more detailed accounts and enabled very accurate tracking of expenses particularly in relation to grants. Ann Eden from BAS Accounting Services has provided an almost seamless transition including organizing invoicing pathways, connectivity between the point of sale and accounting platforms, and rigorous maintenance of recording of all transactions, working closely with staff and the Treasurer to provide a very detailed suite of financial reports tailored to our requirements.

We have provided consolidated reports for your information below. An audit was conducted by Russell Collins, a well-known local accountant who has very generously provided his service pro bono. Thank you, Russell.

## Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre Financial Report Year Ended 30 June 2023

### Receipts and Expenditure – Operating (Cash basis)

	2023	2022	Variance
<b>Retail Sales</b>			
Sale of Goods	78,619	82,489	(3,869)
Cost of Sales	(32,855)	(49,322)	16,467
<b>Total Retail Sales</b>	<b>45,765</b>	<b>33,167</b>	<b>12,598</b>
<b>Total Trading Profit</b>	<b>45,765</b>	<b>33,167</b>	<b>12,598</b>
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>45,765</b>	<b>33,167</b>	<b>12,598</b>
<b>Other Income</b>			
Other Income	10,395	91,097	(80,703)
<b>Total Other Income</b>	<b>10,395</b>	<b>91,097</b>	<b>(80,703)</b>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>56,159</b>	<b>124,264</b>	<b>(68,105)</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
Operating Expenses	38,875	37,172	1,703
Grants - Carry Forward	-	80,000	(80,000)
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>38,875</b>	<b>117,172</b>	<b>(78,297)</b>
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>17,285</b>	<b>7,092</b>	<b>10,193</b>

### GRANT - Receipts and Expenditure (Cash basis)

	2030 Yea Community	FRRR Signage 2021	NAIDOC	RTIF Grant	SCARS Tree	Wetlands COM	Consolidated TOTAL
<b>Donations</b>							
Donations Received	-	-	-	-	-	2,520	2,520
Fundraising	-	-	-	2,901	-	1,459	4,360
<b>Total Donations</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,901</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,979</b>	<b>6,880</b>
<b>Grants</b>							
Grants (Local)	-	-	8,050	-	-	-	8,050
Grants (State) Capital	-	-	-	80,000	-	-	80,000
Grants (State)	2,225	-	-	-	(2,623)	-	(398)
<b>Total Grants</b>	<b>2,225</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>8,050</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>(2,623)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>87,652</b>
<b>TOTAL GRANT INCOME</b>	<b>2,225</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>8,050</b>	<b>82,901</b>	<b>(2,623)</b>	<b>3,979</b>	<b>94,532</b>
<b>Expenses</b>							
TOTAL GRANT EXPENSES	5,148	26,327	3,267	23,395	322	-	58,459
Grant Carry Forward	(2,471)	(3,865)	4,850	59,506	(2,945)	3,979	59,055
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>2,677</b>	<b>22,463</b>	<b>8,117</b>	<b>82,901</b>	<b>(2,623)</b>	<b>3,979</b>	<b>117,514</b>
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>(452)</b>	<b>(22,463)</b>	<b>(67)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(22,981)</b>

## Section Four – Looking to the Future

Building on the successes of the first eight years of operation key priorities for the future include:

- > Successful delivery of the Yea Wetlands Discover Experience Project funded by RTIF Grant, including a new trail and other features in the wetlands, renewal of the interpretive/education centre exhibits, and an indigenous metal sculpture trail.
- > A new exhibition to be designed and created featuring the “History of Yea” to be the final element of renewal of the Interpretive/Education wing.
- > Final installation of the completed new signage in the wetlands
- > Successful transition of the management of the wetlands from the Committee of Management to the Association and the Friends group
- > Continued promotion and marketing of the Centre and its products and experiences
- > Exploring options for reopening of the Yea Wetlands Kiosk
- > Increased utilisation of the Centre’s facilities for meetings and events
- > Expanding membership of the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre Inc to strengthen and support its Executive
- > Further engaging with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council to expand the learning programs on offer to include aboriginal culture and heritage
- > Acknowledging and celebrating the ongoing contribution made by the Centre’s volunteers and supporters
- > Producing an updated strategic plan covering the next four years.

