



Taking Community Action

Friends of Williamstown Wetlands; 3rd Croydon Scout Group; Friends of Westgate Park

Small groups make big efforts for clean waterways

Why?

Litter in our waterways degrades water quality, negatively impacts marine species and creates community health risks. It is, therefore, a problem that affects everyone – and everyone can play a part in making change.

That's why community groups taking action that appears small is actually a vital part of the big picture in terms of litter mitigation and healthy waterways. Every contribution helps, both in terms of direct outcomes and the flow-on effect of inspiring others to make a stand against litter.

Three community groups recently received funding from the Victorian Government's Litter Hotspots Program with delivery by MWRRG to take action in their local areas. Friends of Westgate Park, 3rd Croydon Scout Group and Friends of Williamstown Wetlands all discovered they could make a difference through targeted activities that cleaned up local environments and prioritised the health of our waterways.

How?

Friends of Williamstown Wetlands focused on building community awareness about litter hotspots and building litter minimisation infrastructure. It held several clean up days on Wader Beach and at Greenwich Bay, both sites at which litter threatens bird life. The group and partners studied the effects of plastic waste

on marine life, introduced recycled and reusable 'Boomerang Bags' to the Hobsons Bay municipality, and campaigned to make the municipality plastic bag-free.

Friends of Westgate Park likewise conducted clean ups and engaged partners, including Landcare Australia, CVA, Beach Patrol, Sunday Assembly, EcoCentre and even passengers on the Westgate Punt that travels between Spotswood and Port Melbourne's Westgate Park. The group also ensured proper bin infrastructure was made available to the large number of fishers whose tendency to spend long periods at the Yarra River section of Westgate Park means they are more likely to consume food and drinks on site.





Third Croydon Scout Group's project involved fun litter removal canoe trips on the Yarra River between Wonga Park and Warrandyte. The scouts conducted water sampling and analysis for macro-invertebrate counts and received support from Maroondah Council and its 'My Mullum Creek' bushwalk program. The group worked with WaterWatch and Melbourne Water's River Health team and also engaged in canoe and environmental stewardship training as part of its project.

What was the result?

All three community groups achieved tangible litter reduction outcomes and engaged others to support the health of our waterways.

Third Croydon Scout Group removed a significant amount of rubbish from the Yarra, including illegally dumped car wheels and tyres, building materials and carpet. Scouts gained accreditations – Water Skills, Science and World Environment badges – and the project engaged kids and adults, both on the water and in publicity roles. It wants to create a wider reach for future litter collection activities, and received the added bonus of increased interest in the Scout Group as a direct result of the project.

Friends of Westgate Park collected more than 400 containers during its clean up days, created new bin infrastructure at litter hotspots (especially where fishers stay for long periods) and introduced a 1,100-litre bin for landfill. The group reported that locals' attitudes to litter were changing as a result of the project and litter collection events had proved not only practical but also a lot of fun. It learnt that using the Australian Marine Debris data sheets takes time, but the cataloguing of litter they make possible is worth the effort.

In addition to 1.3 tonnes of litter collected, Friends of Williamstown Wetlands said surveys showed a minor drop in hotshot litter ratings at Wader Beach and Greenwich Bay. It convinced Hobsons Bay Council

to introduce the 'Say No to Plastic Bags' program and the group's 24 litter-related community events were successful. The 'Boomerang Bag' program led to municipal Coles outlets reporting a 25 per cent reduction in single-use plastic bags, and also engaged people with no previous connection to litter issues around a tangible outcome.

The three organisations showed that small groups could have a big impact on the environment, changing attitudes to litter and cleaning and protecting our waterways, all while engaging the community and – not to be forgotten – simply enjoying being together and having fun.

June 2017