



Lot 50–Kanyanyapilla, McLaren Vale
Bi-cultural Ecological and Cultural Regeneration
Newsletter No 22, Spring 2021

Hi Everyone

The focus of this newsletter is water. It's been in the news for both good and bad reasons of late (as usual but the climate change extremes are worrying). So here's some local info.

News

Water in the Swamp

I reported back in July that water was flowing into the swamp for the first time since August 2017. This recent flow was hugely assisted by Council's installation of culverts under the Pethick Road swamp crossing. There may have been enough water this time to eventually top the old road which formed a dam but we'll never know. Possibly was but I had been fooled a few times before thinking it was about to flood over. Low flows will now be more regular.

Peak volume was Sunday 25th July; it takes about 24-36 hours to flow down the catchment once saturated.



Swamp edge, L50K



And flow height can now be readily measured at one of the culverts, got to 280 mm above floor.

And water not only in the swamp. One of the sedge lines is fed by the runoff from Victor Harbor Road and that flows into L50K more frequently than the creek flows into the swamp. But this was a bumper.



Heading down Branson Track past the Culture Shack



And down the Sedgeline, Shelter Shed just out of view on the left

First Yacca Flower Spike

It's not from the biggest *Xanthorrhoea semiplana* *Kurru* but it got the jump on its older cousins. Known as kertamundro the flower head produces a sweet drink in water and the stalk is used for fire making. I'll watch its growth with delight.



Other Stuff

Thank You

Just want to say thank you to all those who responded to the 182 years ago snippet about Wauwitpinna and Schurmann. Your comments are appreciated, as are all comments and dialogue about the newsletter. There will be a part 2 to the story soon.

And thanks also to those who contributed to the 'what's cultural regeneration look like' discussion. Nothing clear there yet, but all food for thought (and future actions and activities).

McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan (MVWAP)

The MVWAP was first introduced twenty one years ago to monitor underground water supplies and regulate their use. It was reviewed in 2007 and is now being reviewed again. I'm pleased to have been appointed to the Review

Advisory Committee by the Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board. The eleven member Committee represents the broad range of water use interests and I'm there as a community representative with a bent towards the cultural values of water and its history in the Willunga Basin. And as a swamp steward,

My general understanding has been that the aquifer is in reasonable health but may be under some pressure. I'll find out more now. But what will climate change impacts be? And it's not just the aquifer, its surface water as well to be considered. To state the obvious, water politics is a tricky business. We're definitely not at the Murray Darling Basin level but we have a nice little microcosm down here. I'll keep you informed.

Couldn't Have Imagined – Sedgeline Six Years On

2015 – April Slashing for the first time (didn't even know the sedges were there until regrowth after slashing)



2017 – January Mid ground - Winter 2016 planting in their tree guards



2021 July Pie & Wine with friends in the juvenile Redgum forest *Karra wirra*. We are sitting in the left side of the 2017 photo



Swamp Research Project

A research project is soon to be underway with the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Adelaide. Paleoclimatologist Dr Jonathon Tyler, colleague Lucinda Cameron Duxbury, assisted by Masters Student Kym Edwards and undergraduate volunteers are to core sample the swamp bed and then trace the record trapped in the swamp mud.

This will provide an environmental context to correlate with the existing archaeological evidences to provide a more informed picture of the past several thousand years in terms of climate, flora distribution and human activity.

This is the first of this type of research undertaken in the Willunga Basin. Exciting stuff and can't wait for the results.

Happening in the Hood

This month is combined with the History Snippet and the water focus.

History Snippet

We'll start 3 billion years ago then and then jump forward to the 1990s!!

Ever had a wine that you thought tasted like dinosaur's piss? Well that's probably because it once was (but not from McLaren Vale). Water is not renewable, it is recyclable and that has been happening for billions of years. The amount of water on our good planet Earth has been static for 3 billion years; it is recycled over and over again through bio-physical systems (sorry I can't use the word nature or natural. It's all anthropocentric); the oceans, the clouds, living organisms etc, including us.

97% of our planet's water is sea water, only 3% is fresh water to support all terrestrial life. And of that 3%, about 75% has been locked up in the polar caps, glaciers (well, we'll see about that), the atmosphere etc. so only 0.5% of the Earth's water is available as fresh water. And there's more than just humans who need that.

Stating the obvious, water is an essential life giving resource; ecological and economic.

[Editor's Note: How can anyone really know what dinosaur's piss tastes like?

Author's Response: OK, OK got me there. Just a figure of speech and a figment of my imagination]

The Willunga Basin Water Company

Never heard of it? And what does it matter?

Well if you drink McLaren Vale wines you should have and it does.

And for many other reasons as well. WBW operates a large recycled water scheme in the region, taking recycled water from Christies Beach Sewerage Plant and distributing it throughout the region through its own pipe, pumping and storage scheme.

WBW was formed in 1999 as a wine grower/landowner initiative to utilise a waste resource and take pressure off groundwater supplies. Nutrient rich waste water was just discharged into the gulf to the detriment of sea grasses etc. It still is but at a lot less volume and at a higher quality, monitored under licence from the Environmental Protection Authority.

In 1999 the McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan was also initiated, a merging of the Willunga Basin Prescribed Wells Area and the Upper Willunga Catchment Moratorium Area. About 7 gigalitres was being extracted back then, about 0.5 gigalitres more than the estimated rechargeable yield (sorry, can't use the word sustainable, too hackneyed). I don't know current figures but will soon find out.

WBW now takes about 8 gigalitres of recycled water per annum, but there's still about 5-6 gigalitres that goes into the sea. To capture that though needs winter storage for summer use and that isn't easy or inexpensive. Water politics and economics will determine that over the next decade or so.

The recycled water has enabled the expansion of the wine industry over the last 20 years for better or worse. There's been a loss of mixed agricultural-horticultural use in the Willunga Basin in favour of an almost monoculture. But recycled water has also taken pressure off the aquifer and brought economic benefits.

Economics and ecology will be competing here as elsewhere. At point of origin the recycled water is a community resource, it's our government that decides what to do with it and under what conditions. One issue is that all water not be contracted to one private company, that some is held in reserve for the greater community good as climate change pressures kick in. But it may already be contracted, I don't know.

And just to underscore the economic and business value of water. WBW is part of Water Utilities Australia (WUA) which is owned by the Global Diversified Infrastructure Fund (GDIF) and managed by First Sentier Investors (FSI).

WUA used to be owned by Colonial National which was owned by the Commonwealth Bank. So none of this is meant to scare you, just inform you. Many of our national infrastructure assets are owned by investment funds etc. It's the trend our governments allow.

But back home again. In 2017 WBW proposed to build a new water storage lagoon (dam) at Bowering Hill adjacent Aldinga. Didn't go down too well locally and there was a bit of a stoush. The Friends of Willunga Basin (FOWB), of which I am a committee member, spent a lot of time on the issue; there were definitely pros and cons. WBW withdrew its proposal for that site; and you probably haven't even noticed that there is now a 600 ml storage lagoon just off the Victor Harbor Road at Seaford Heights (to your right travelling south). It's perched on a hill and the slopes are being revegetated.



Bird's eye view (image courtesy WBW)

And there's another twist to the story. This lagoon construction and operating is a multi-party deal and cost about \$7.3 million; it was built on land owned by Southern Region Waste Resource Authority (SRWRA) which is a three Council owned waste management authority, it was part funded by the Commonwealth Government (\$2.5 million) and part funded (\$4.8 million) and operated by WBW with the McLaren Vale Irrigators Council being in the mix as well. A condition of government funding was that there be a community financial benefit, step forward the McLaren Vale Community Sustainability Company which is charged with distributing those funds. And Biodiversity McLaren Vale, of which I am a committee member, receives some funding from this. BMV also has a Planting Partnership with WBW to vegetate around a smaller dam on the eastern side of Victor Harbor Road, you can see the Yellow Tail sign there.

This is all to say that 'oils ain't just oils' and 'water ain't just H2O'. It is a resource where an acute and informed awareness is desirable if not essential. History creates or contributes to a future: precedent sets precedent for future events and outcomes. In a climate change challenged world, water 'ownership' and distribution will be further contested.

I'm not too concerned about the trend to a contemporary viticultural mono-culture. Land utilisation changes and responds to the exigencies of the era. I remember 30 years ago when the Basin wasn't predominantly vines; and in 30 years' time it may not be again. I also remember when we had publicly funded vine pull schemes to reduce grape volumes. But sound water awareness, water policy and water infrastructure will assist whatever the land utilisation will be. Maybe 'water policy' should be re-termed 'water culture'; the cultural values of water are prime; and economics is a sub set of culture.

So when the swamp fully floods in my and my neighbour's place, and for a short time holds about 22.5 megalitres of water, I see, think and thank many things.

Cheers *Gavin*

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