

# News of Friends of Grasslands

Volume 1 Issue 1

22 November 1994

## Our first meeting

Help plan FOG from the ground up. We need your input - what should FOG's role be? What are the immediate priorities? Come and meet your fellow FOG members and exchange ideas. Meeting details page 4.

## FOG launch

It was standing room only in the National Museum of Australia's theatre when between 70 and 80 guests attended the launch of Friends of Grasslands on Saturday 12 November.

After viewing displays on grassland issues - including live animals, much to the delight of younger guests - we heard addresses from several speakers, introduced by Michael Hissink (President, Environment Centre of Canberra and the SE Region).

In his launch address, Bill Wood (ACT Minister for the Environment, Land and Planning) pointed out that none of the ACT's original treeless grasslands are in reserves.

Sarah Sharp and Kruno Kukolic (ACT Parks and Conservation Service - Wildlife Research Unit) provided an introduction to the grasslands of the ACT region - their extent and history, and some of the issues regarding their conservation.

Ted Edwards (CSIRO Division of Entomology) highlighted the crucial role of insects in the grasslands ecosystem, particularly insects as herbivores and nutrient recyclers. Ted stressed the enormous power of 'friends' groups to fill knowledge gaps which funding shortfalls prevented scientific bodies from filling.

Geoff Butler (Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Australian Network for Plant Conservation) urged FOG to look widely at how best to achieve its

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objectives. FOG should not be seen as just a cheap labour force - it was much more than that, including a political ally to grasslands.

In wishing FOG well, Michael Hissink paraphrased John F. Kennedy by urging us to "Ask not what your grasslands can do for you, but what you can do for your grasslands".

Over champagne and strawberries in a sunny courtyard afterwards, glasses clinked and conversation flowed as giant tubed native grasses waved their flower heads in the breeze, with blue wahlenbergias and yellow ranunculas adding to the atmosphere.

Half way through our second glass of champagne, Michael's ear-splitting whistle summoned us for the grasslands walk - a tour of degraded grasslands in the museum grounds.

Led by Sarah, Kruno and Geoff, with assistance from Jo Walker (Conservation Officer, Society for Growing Australian Plants Canberra Region) and Dave Mallinson (Australian National Botanic Gardens), the walk highlighted a number of conservation issues.

## Media Coverage

David Mussared's superb article in the Science and Technology pages of The Canberra Times (8 November) got publicity off to a great start, followed by coverage in The Chronicle (week ending 14 November), WIN TV's evening News (12 November), The Canberra Times (20 November) and Radio 2CN's 6.30 am news (12 November) and Afternoon Program (22 November).

*'None of the original treeless grasslands in the ACT are in reserves'*

Bill Wood



*'Invertebrates are the principal herbivores of the grasslands'*

Ted Edwards



However we've barely scratched the surface. Much more needs to be done if we are to get the grasslands message out to the wider community. Media kits were sent to dozens of media outlets in advance of the launch, but time prevented us monitoring them all. If you spotted media coverage of FOG other than the above, please let us know.

### **FOG membership**

Less than a fortnight after the launch we already have around 80 applications to join FOG. And what members! As you'll see from the Member Profile enclosed with this newsletter, we have a fantastic range of skills, expertise and interests represented. An organisation could hardly hope to get off to a better start.

There is no membership fee as yet - setting a membership fee structure will need to be one of FOG's early priorities.

### **SGAP's role**

Time to make clear what the heck Society for Growing Australian Plants is doing in all of this. Why did SGAP organise the launch? Why is a SGAP member writing this newsletter? And why is SGAP organising the first meeting of FOG members? Earlier this year Sarah Sharp asked if SGAP would be willing to get a Friends of Grasslands group off the ground. Sarah and others had felt for some time that grasslands needed their own community support group, and SGAP agreed. Someone needed to make the first move, to do the organising, and SGAP was happy to fulfil that role.

There are expenses involved in launching a new idea and raising community awareness, and so SGAP looked for funding to launch FOG. FOG could not seek funding itself yet - it did not exist as an entity, let alone a corporation.

The upshot is that funding of \$7,000 has been granted to SGAP, by the Recovery Team for the Lowland Native Grasslands Recovery Plan (payable through the ACT Parks & Conservation Service's Wildlife

Research Unit) to launch FOG. The funding is for -

- provision of launch catering (minus champagne and strawberries) and venue hire
- preparation, printing and distribution of leaflets
- preparation of a full colour poster promoting FOG and grasslands generally
- postage and stationery costs.

Funding for the poster is conditional on SGAP liaising (through Sarah Sharp) with the Recovery Team and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service's Interpretations Unit regarding the poster's production.

The poster could be a great early focus for FOG, and a wonderful way of getting the grasslands message out to community.

Is FOG linked to SGAP? No - FOG will be an independent community group in its own right. The only link - a very temporary one - is that SGAP has contractual responsibility for ensuring that the work for which funding has been granted is carried out, and for controlling and accounting for the grant funds.

Edwina Barton (SGAP's outgoing President) will be the FOG liaison person within SGAP, and will provide short term organisational support for FOG until FOG is on its feet.

### **First meeting of FOG**

After a stroll in the grasslands garden, and before an informal lunch get together, we'll get down to business in the Theatre with Geoff Butler acting as chair/facilitator.

When a group first forms, there is much to be decided. What should the group be called? Should we incorporate? What are our objects? How should the group operate? What positions or committees are needed? What should our early priorities be?

One meeting will not resolve all that. But it should allow us to sound out members' views and to at least tease out some of the top priority tasks.

*80 FOG members in less than a fortnight!*

*\$7,000 funding for FOG - including poster*

## How should FOG be structured ?

### Incorporation and finances

If one of FOG's key goals is to quickly build widespread community understanding of and support for grasslands, this will take money - more money than we could raise in membership fees alone. On membership fees alone, it might take more time than the grasslands themselves can afford - our victory could be somewhat pyrrhic.

Whether we decide to look to government funding for this or to major corporate sponsorship, or both, incorporation of FOG will be a prerequisite.

It may therefore make sense to make constitutional development and incorporation an early priority. A Constitutional and Incorporation Committee could start the ball rolling, co-ordinating input from FOG members.

### Sponsorship and grants

Perhaps FOG members with commercial or grants expertise could form a committee to explore opportunities for both commercial sponsorship and government grants, so that once incorporated we can move quickly to capitalise on the most promising opportunities.

### Community liaison

Networking will probably emerge as a vital - and time consuming - aspect of FOG's work.

One way to make sure nothing falls through the cracks might be to appoint liaison officers (or committees) for some of the key community sectors, for instance:

- scientific
- town planning
- Landcare and Parkcare
- conservation
- agricultural
- horticultural (including seed suppliers)
- landscaping
- educational (schools, universities etc.)
- media.

Those officers (or committees) could be responsible for establishing and maintaining

contact with persons and organisations in those sectors whose work, or support, was important for grasslands.

### Public education and information

Since informing and educating the public is likely to be one of FOG's most important goals, it may make sense to create a committee to develop a long term plan for this. That committee would work closely with the community liaison officers to create information programs with maximum impact and cost effectiveness.

### Poster development

Since we already have funding for a poster, it may make sense to create a Poster Committee fairly quickly, to begin soliciting and organising ideas from members and others, and working towards some concept outlines to discuss with the membership, Recovery Team etc.

### Newsletter

To keep in touch with its members and also with the wider community, FOG will need a good newsletter. (What you are reading now is just a short term solution.)

A well-produced newsletter can itself be a highly effective public education tool, going into libraries, schools and other institutions to raise awareness of grassland issues generally, as well as of FOG.

Formation of a Newsletter Committee should probably be an early priority, and acquisition of (or access to) desk-top publishing facilities a follow-up priority (not impossible with corporate sponsorship).

Designing the masthead and selecting a name for the newsletter is itself a lot of fun - *(Not the Yorkshire) FOG ? Grassland Matters ? Synemon Bun ?*

### Data collection and storage

One of FOG's most valuable roles is likely to be as a clearing house for information on grassland issues.

• *Executive committee*

• *Liaison officers*  
- scientific  
- agricultural  
- media etc.

• *other committees*  
- constitutional and incorporation  
- sponsorship and grants  
- grasslands information  
- public information and education  
- member activities  
- poster  
- newsletter

## How should FOG be structured ?

Our skill in locating, capturing and making accessible a wealth of data (scientific and otherwise) on grasslands will not only influence how quickly our own members get up to speed on grasslands, but also FOG's ability to participate constructively in discussion with government and others on grassland issues.

How best to organise this - perhaps a Grasslands Information Committee ? The task seems too big to ask one person to fulfil.

Our data collection is likely to include video tape, photographs, audio tapes, computer records (perhaps even CD ROM), dried herbarium and other specimens, and living specimens (eg tubbed plants), as well as paper records.

Acquisition of a personal computer and suitable software would help control and manipulate this data - perhaps another reason to make the pursuit of adequate funding an early priority

### Member activities

Whatever FOG does for the wider community, there will still be a need to organise activities that meet the needs and interests of FOG's own members.

These might include not only guest speakers and field trips, but also structured training courses arranged within the TAFE and University systems and elsewhere on grassland issues. Such courses might include, for instance, identification of grassland species, or introduction to grassland regeneration.

A Member Activities Committee would be one way of organising this.

### Executive Committee

Committees/officers would be responsible to FOG's Executive Committee, which could consist of President, Treasurer, Secretary etc. It might make sense for all committee leaders, and all liaison officers, to be members of the Executive Committee

### Ideas, please !

The above is meant to be no more than an ideas starter - it is up to FOG members to decide how FOG should be structured and what its goals and priorities should be.

Why not phone or fax your ideas through to Edwina by Friday night so we can get them up on the butchers paper for others to consider as they arrive at the meeting. The more the merrier !

Look forward to seeing you at our first meeting -

**11 am Saturday 26 November 1994**  
**Visitor Information Centre**  
**Australian National Botanic Gardens**  
**Clunies Ross St, Black Mountain**  
**Canberra ACT**

Please RSVP to Edwina Barton by Thursday night 24 November :

**Phone (06) 253 1860 W/H**  
**Fax (06) 251 2747 W/H**  
**Friends of Grasslands c/- SGAP**  
**PO Box 217 Civic Square, ACT**  
**2608**