

Recollections of Diane Matthews, life member and past president of CRREPA at a birthday celebration on 31 May 2024*

Well, here we are, 30 years! Who would have thought that over that time we would have had so much fulfillment, satisfaction, personal development and enjoyment – to balance the frustrations and hard work. Congratulations one and all, and sincere thanks to the City of Canning for this opportunity to be here together today.

Looking back - Where to start? So many memories. I had thought I'd gather some memories from others but soon realised that together with my own we would be here all night! Even so I had far too much material, so I've decided to give a taste of the times; of how CRREPA started; and how it developed over the first, say, 10 to 15 years.

I feel that to help put those times into perspective – we should go back another 30 years to the 1960s. Rossmoyne/Shelley was a very young suburb. When we purchased our block in 1965 homes were scattered across the landscape. With many areas, in Shelley particularly, being mainly landfill from the dredging of the river channel. This resulted in large, sandy, disconnected sections of foreshore, of acres of weedy veldt grass between properties, and with some scattered remnant damp areas with Paperbark trees.

Leach Highway wasn't there when we purchased our block; Beatrice Ave was a gravel track coming down from High Road. There were few fences and we could walk through vacant blocks to the river. My Mother remarked "What do you want to go and live all the way out there for?" and she lived just across in South Perth. It was considered 'out of town'.

By the 1990s many of these original 60s & 70s and into the 80's 'pioneers' had developed strong connections to the area, which is now confined by Leach Highway, the Canning River and the Bullcreek Estuary. Many had been originally attracted by the proximity to the river. Over time some of us had started to note the disappearance of the occasional Race-horse Goanna on the road; the fact it was no longer necessary to keep the front door shut to avoid the entry of a Blue-tongue lizard; that there were no longer any 'jumping mice' around (? What were they?), or that the Rainbow Bee-eaters no longer migrated here each year to mass along the powerlines out the front and build nest borrows in the sandy patches – because they were built on.

With growing children and developing suburban infrastructure many residents were experienced in volunteering, starting organisations, and being involved in local matters. Some of us had taken it upon ourselves to weed out the weedy 'Dock' amongst the sedges; the 'Fleabane' amongst the trees; or to focus on removing a half-dozen 'Thistles' on each daily dog-walk. We were becoming environmentally aware and active!

In 1979 I wrote to the City querying, amongst other things, the possibility of having log fencing installed along the foreshore to discourage it being "*continually cut to pieces by vehicles*". I received a prompt reply saying that the possibility of funding would be considered in the 1979/80 budget.

At that time the sprinklers on Shelley Reserve were on stands and hoses and manually moved around the reserve, and in that 1979 letter I also began a discussion about keeping the water spray out of the sedges, because the grass followed the water, and the mowing staff followed the grass, which was reducing the sedge bed. By July 1980 a truce had been achieved and it was "*confirmed that it is not the policy of the Council to mow into the reed cover on the foreshore ...*", and staff had been instructed to "*ensure that no further incursion is made ...*". Eventually fixed sprinklers were installed, sited away from the sedges, and during the CRREPA years, a chemical barrier between grass and sedges was achieved.

So, therefore When in 1994 the Lower Canning River Management Plan was prepared by the Swan River Trust (SRT) and circulated, and around the same time the Bull Creek Wetlands Study was prepared by the City of Melville in conjunction with the City of Canning, with both reports

highlighting the degrading state of the areas under study, and giving ideas for management, there was great local interest.

Things moved quickly ... By May 1994 CRREPA was formed and by the end of that year the archives record that CRREPA had gathered signatures on a petition that was presented to the Canning Council. Had prepared a detailed submission about the state of the Bull Creek Wetlands and the Canning Foreshore and presented it to both the SRT and the full Council. This was described as *'a professional document complete with plans and colour photographs showing the state of the river ...'* ^{1 and 2} and which did lead to a full review of how these documents would be implemented. CRREPA's First General Meeting had been held in July at the Rossmoyne Hall, Central Road at which a Constitution was presented ¹. By August CRREPA had become Incorporated, with membership exceeding 200, and the Association was also fully accredited with the City of Canning, who showed their support with a donation of \$150. ²

All this was recorded in the first edition of CRREPA News in November 1994 – 2 pages, 3 columns, small print – The Newsletter noted that *"We anticipate that most of our ideas will be incorporated in the Council's management plan for the wetland/foreshore area"*. This quote makes me smile, because it is a marvellous illustration of the dynamic enthusiasm and expectations of the inaugural members. There definitely was a dynamic duo on the dynamic team – Margo and Cam Ross, from Riverton Drive, Rossmoyne. Margot was a Councillor from 1987 to 1990. You can read all about these two amazing people in the latest CRREPA News, No.66 April 2024! We lost them much too soon to cancer. Margot in June 1998 aged only 61, and Cam in May 2009. They inspired us all.

The full inaugural team ² deserves to be listed here at our 30th anniversary celebration:

Chris Baddeley, President, who later declined due to work commitments,

Margot Ross, Vice President, then President

Cam Ross, Treasurer

Michelle Kagi, Secretary

Rosetta Clark, Committee, together with the following

Vera Colley

Ray & Lorna Colpitts

John Cooke

Carolyn & Ian Dunn

Brett Ensor

Ken & Maureen Hopkins

Eleanor Kappelle

Alan Miller

Sandy & Terry Potter

Eric Winterburn

Together they represented Rossmoyne, Shelley, Riverton, Bullcreek and Sherwin Lodge (now Rossmoyne Waters). This shows the vision and intended reach of the inaugural team.

There was a Water Sampling & Testing Group, also a Seed Collection & Propagation Group; the Replanting Foreshore Vegetation Group; the Foreshore Vegetation Survey Group; and the Bird Survey Group! Lots to do. ²

Oh, and to add that during this same year an application to *"Greening Australia" for 15,000 juncus plants (reeds), and to the Council for 2000 paperbarks, 500 river gums and 500 sheoak seedlings was approved"*. Quantities of seed had been collected from local trees and it was arranged that the Council would provide its plant nursery facilities to propagate the seeds, with

planting expected to start in the next year, 1995! ² Of course we were inexperienced and this timeline was unrealistic, and we found early planting sessions needed purchased plants.

The November 1994 Newsletter also mentions the ‘excellent links’ forged with the SRT, and how their officer (possibly Darryl Miller), responsible for the final draft of the Lower Canning River Management Plan had joined Margot Ross on site “*in order to be more informed about the problems we face along the foreshore*”. This also makes me smile! Margot firmly believed in site visits! These face-to-face contacts with a related official continued into all future projects and issues.

Here I must mention Steve Atwell, who was Manager, Parks & Reserves, at the City of Canning at that time. I have great respect for Steve who had to negotiate and balance the future-focused expectations of the Ross’s/CRREPA, with those who were more comfortable with the status quo. It couldn’t have been easy. The resulting significant foreshore improvements within the City, across those early years, only happened because of his sympathetic support and encouragement. The respectful liaison that was established couldn’t have happened without him.

We were blessed with Steve and later also with Mary Ross, who was Senior Park Services Officer, who is a calm, patient person, across the issues and listened and advised. Wonderful! Thanks Steve and Mary.

So CRREPA was up and running In no particular order here are just a few of my personal memories of those early years. I know there will be other memories amongst us all and other versions of all the activities.

1. By 1995 work had begun in Yagan Wetland Reserve, on clearing a tangled jungle of climbing lantana (*Lantana camara*), Ipomea (*Ipomoea carica*), and Dolichos pea which together were smothering all the trees. While Arum Lilies (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*) and weedy Paspalum grasses smothered everything else. There was an illegal weir on site which supported a diverse vegie garden that extended down from Sherwin Lodge (now Rossmoyne Waters) and also supported large Tree ferns (*Cyathea cooperi*), enormous Papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), and Banana Palms. Margot arranged for the latter to be removed and taken to the elephants at Perth Zoo. All good publicity!
2. Photos from 1995 through 1996 and 1997 show proof of the hard work that went into clearing weeds from large areas of Yagan, then adding weed matting to the creek line for stability and replanting with sedges and trees. We were all on a steep learning and experimental curve. Sadly, a large quantity of the sedges sourced from a local nursery were not local but a viciously spikey *Juncus acutus*. To their credit the nursery removed and replaced them before they flowered. Then in February 1998 fire tore through the Reserve and came dangerously close to Sherwin Lodge (Rossmoyne Waters). This persuaded everyone to leave the weir in place! The Fire Brigade had been able to use it to suppress the fire.
3. By June 2000 Tim Rogers and Phil Boglio were employed by the City as inaugural Bush Crew. Over some years they worked willingly with us on many foreshore weeding and planting events. This worked well and was much appreciated.
4. Early on it was just Tim who joined us at Brolga Lake, Willetton. This lake drains into Bullcreek and the water quality was a concern. We worked to remove stands of Bullrushes (*Typha orientalis*) using board-platforms made by Tim and which were moved out from the bank to the leading edge over deeper water where the Typha was physically removed. Tim fell in. Over a couple of years the lake shoreline was also weeded and sedges planted.
5. Also, Bullrush flower-heads from large stands dotted along the river foreshore were manually cut off, to discourage their spread, and limit the annual storm of seed blowing across gardens and sticking to fly- screens. Then the discovery that the plants could more

easily be controlled by pushing them over by standing on them and drowning them – with assistance and great enthusiasm from the Rossmoyne High School Rangers.

6. And the One-or-two-full day planting sessions that targeted large sandy gaps in the foreshore vegetation that were at risk of erosion. These involved sourcing plants, displays, inviting other community volunteering groups, sausage sizzles, mobile toilets, and much organisation. Also, the excellent initiative by the City to shift the path in Rossmoyne to increase the foreshore buffer area ready for more plants. Locals now wouldn't realise the amount of plants and work that has gone into all these improvements.
7. For example, the beach at the end of Beryl Avenue, the original Shelley Sailing Club site, started by residents from across the road. After the Club was shifted CRREPA and Council attempted for some years to revegetate the sandy beach that was left. Nothing grew. After a soil sample was tested, high contamination of anti-fouling off the boats was found to be present. Site shaping and persistent planting gradually won as the contaminant dissipated.
8. I remember the friendly Foreshore Working Groups that formed at sections along the foreshore. Each having their own leader and enthusiastic locals who set their own day and time of the month to gather and do whatever was needed. These have developed into a successful system of email notices inviting anyone available to attend wherever is targeted for planting, weeding etc. While committed individuals continue to maintain their favourite patch.
9. Then there was the sand bought down from the suburb through the pipe at the bottom of Beatrice Ave, and which had formed a low-tide sandbar out into the river and which was to be dredged by SRT until CRREPA pointed out that it had become an important waterbird resting site for that section of river, and is now used for regular bird counting sessions run by Grecian Sandwell, who was President at our 20th Anniversary, together with Colma Keating – the area has been officially named Grecian's Spit.

There have been, and still are, so many wonderful, special people. Amazing individuals.

10. Max Risbey on his bike complete with plants and tools, patrolling the strip and strengthening the vegetation where needed. Max's amazing inventiveness – taking on growing plants when he learned of the commercial cost. From a small production he soon moved up a grade or two onto his home-constructed hydroponic-type system that produced thousands of plants. And his own designed and built, foot operated hole-digger.
11. The wonderful site maps drawn up by Terry Potter, showing suggested planting arrangements. Which helped enormously with "How many plants to order?? How far apart??" We didn't know Sadly, Terry and enthusiastic Sandy are no longer with us.
12. Of using the long extendable poles, with a container on the end, to collect water samples in Bannister Creek - just one of several sites. John Cooke's back terrace for the regular water testing sessions. His photographic record kept over the early years. Another key member sadly missed.
13. Vera Colley and Rosetta Clarke who had seen me weeding Dock and approached me to join in. They were an excellent set of eyes reporting damage and vandalism. Now sadly fading.
14. The ever kind, efficient and strategic organising team of Colma and Grecian. Colma's thoughtful collection of botanical pressings to guide weeders away from local plants. Also, their taking on making an entry for CRREPA into the State Environment Awards. We didn't win, but Colma, Grecian and I enjoyed the recognition on behalf of CRREPA, and the camaraderie of all the other like-minded people on the Awards' night.
15. We have also lost past President, Ken Keesing who loved Tuarts (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*). The foreshore Tuarts were planted in the 1970s as part of the Gough Whitlam Federal Government's Regional Economic Development Scheme along with the original foreshore path.

16. I also remember John Robertson, who was the first officially recognised Bush Regenerator Contractor in Perth and was employed by the City for early work with us in Yagan.
17. Thanks also to generous botanists, and other volunteers e.g. Jo and Richard Stone, working in other areas and who were willing to give of their time and knowledge. The support provided by the growing number of excellent botanical publications and pamphlets. The wonderfully supportive workshops held by the State's Environmental Protection Agency, run by Margo O'Byrne. It was a time of learning and discovery.
18. And my dear Gary who was always there ready to drive in a star-picket to hold a banner; to connect up the trailer; to load and unload plants; and who, with little bookkeeping experience, created Excel spreadsheets (no proformas in those days) to record income & expenses and linked the sheets to easily provide professional annual audited reports.

Wonderful people, and others I have not had time to mention, all who shaped and motivated the Association. Those who were always there and gave their reliable and enthusiastic support for the aims of CRREPA. Sadly, some are no longer with us, while others have moved away. Then there are those who are more recent, like Stephen Johnston, (thanks Stephen), who have dedicated their time and support, and have contributed their knowledge and skills into the mix. I acknowledge them here this afternoon. Together CRREPA and the City have seen the foreshore strengthened and protected to where it is today. We have something we can truly be proud of.

Thirty Years!! This has been only my memories, my version, of those early years; I know there will be other memories and other versions amongst us all.

But for now, my heart-felt congratulations, and thanks, to all the 'rivercarers' and to the City of Canning - one and all. It has been a wonderful life experience for me, I wouldn't have missed it, although at the time I didn't know what I was getting into.

¹ Circular to Members, undated (June?) 1994

² CRREPA News Nov 1994

*The celebration was attended by the member for Cannington, the Hon Bill Johnston MLA; the Mayor of Canning, Cr Patrick Hall; Deputy Mayor, Cr Amanda Spencer-Teo and Cr Ben Kunze who both represent Bannister ward along with about 35 CRREPA members and friends. Current CRREPA President, Stephen Johnston gave the welcome and introduction. Mayor Hall acknowledged the welcome, thanked and enlarged on the contribution made to the City of Canning by CRREPA. Diane Matthews was followed by long-serving City of Canning environment manager and technical officer, Mary Ross.