

CHANGES TO THE OBP MONITORING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

On May 31, the FoOBP Committee (the Committee) attended a meeting with the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) OBP Program and were informed that there has been a department wide review of volunteer engagement and the OBP volunteer program has been chosen to pilot new policies for recruiting and managing volunteers. The changes are driven by consideration of risks and liabilities and the review was undertaken as a response to a serious volunteer injury in northern Tasmania in another program. Many details of the new arrangements are not yet available, however, the brief outline that we were given was enough for us to realise that the changes have significant consequences for our role in the OBP monitoring program at Melaleuca and also provide us with the opportunity to broaden our role and influence.

Volunteer recruitment

DPIPWE have decided to take over the entire administration of the OBP Melaleuca volunteer monitoring program, much of which was previously done by us. Volunteers will now be recruited through advertisements in the media rather than through Friends of the OBP and specialist bird magazines. Membership of FoOBP will not be required for volunteers engaged by DPIPWE.

Our members can register to volunteer by responding to the DPIPWE advertisements rather than an expression of interest through our branch. In the past we could ensure that volunteers were members of FoOBP, however, increased advertising outside our membership is likely to lead to more non-FoOBP people being selected. It is possible that some of our members will be selected for the roster but it is also possible for the roster to be filled with people who are not members of FoOBP.

DPIPWE will draft the selection report and administer records of volunteers. Much of this work was previously done by us. FoOBP has been offered one place on the selection panel.

DPIPWE has acknowledged that we will be able to continue to invite new volunteers to join our branch, however, providing names and contact details of their volunteers to us may breach privacy laws, so at this stage we are not confident that this will occur.

During the 2018/19 season 25 people were engaged from 35 formal applications to undertake the 30 weeks of observation. In most years, we receive 40-60 expressions of interest to be involved in the Melaleuca program – more than enough to fill the positions – so it is not clear why there is a need to advertise more broadly. DPIPWE indicated that there have been barriers to participation but they have not articulated to the FoOBP Committee what these have been or provided us with an opportunity to remedy these barriers (if they exist).

Program fundraising

DPIPWE have committed to raising and managing funds for flights and have requested that FoOBP assist them to apply for funds through the Wildcare Gift Fund.

Flight bookings

DPIPWE will book all flights during the 2019/20 season. Last season FoOBP booked flights and this reflected funding arrangements.

DPIPWE intimated that volunteers who had their flights paid for through Go Fund Me were not covered by insurance. This seems odd considering Par Avion is a commercial operator and presumably they have insurance cover for all passengers. The Committee are seeking clarification from DPIPWE about this risk as it may have implications for future FoOBP activities.

Mark has advised that because DPIPWE have committed to booking all volunteer flights next season, up to \$10,00 raised through his Go Fund Me initiative that was ear-marked for flights will now be redirected to other FoOBP priority projects.

Accommodation at Melaleuca

DPIPWE advised that their volunteers will be accommodated at either the PWS hut or in tents. DPIPWE have made it clear that they do not require the use of the Willson house for volunteers, however, they suggested that FoOBP may wish to coordinate the use of the house through private arrangements.

Mark has met with Barbara to discuss the new arrangements and NBN improvements. An accommodation roster, including Willson family requirements and guest availability for next season will be developed in conjunction with Barbara. FoOBP will ensure that experienced members, who Barbara trusts, will be entrusted to close the house as required.

Willson's Feedtable

FoOBP has been asked by DPIPWE to coordinate access to the Willson house dining table for monitoring the feed table. However, there remains a question of liability for DPIPWE because Barbara's house would be considered a work site. Barbara has been consulted on access to her house for observations and the use of her lease for the feed table, and she has requested that FoOBP resolve this matter formally with DPIPWE.

FoOBP Resources

Scopes - FoOBP has been asked to continue to provide scopes for the three observation points.

Bikes - will also be available although at the meeting, DPIPWE said they don't want volunteers to use the bikes because they had identified this as a high risk and they didn't want to take responsibility.

NBN - volunteers often contact DPIPWE using FoOBP-provided NBN from Barbara's house. DPIPWE has not at this stage asked for access to our NBN but given the reliability of this service, it will no doubt be required.

Opportunity for volunteering for work with captive OBP population

DPIPWE will also advertise for volunteers to participate in captive management activities such as working bees, horticulture and OBP husbandry at the new Five Mile Beach facility.

Any volunteer will need to be registered as a volunteer with DPIPWE to be involved in their programs. Again DPIPWE does not require these volunteers to be members of FoOBP, However, they invited us to support and be involved in this new initiative. This has the potential to diversify our membership and provide other opportunities for members to be involved in the Recovery Program.

Considering our future directions – the way forward

The OBP monitoring program was a major focus of our work towards the recovery of the OBP population. Our volunteer observers have contributed over 400 days of effort each year to assist the DPIPWE program and the Committee provided their valuable time to help administer this well-respected volunteer program. Importantly, we have managed this program with only minor incidents. The FoOBP have also raised and managed significant funds for the project. While the Committee is disappointed by DPIPWE's lack of appreciation of this significant effort, we now have an opportunity to reconsider how we engage with DPIPWE and broaden the projects that we are involved with. The Committee is in the process of developing several new initiatives (see below) We will be working with various stakeholders including DPIPWE to implement these projects over the next twelve months.

We have considered these changes and your Committee is recommending the following:

- 1) We will consider assisting DPIPWE or any other stakeholder with funding applications on a case-by-case basis.
- 2) We accept the DPIPWE offer of having a FoOBP member on the volunteer selection panel.
- 3) We accept the DPIPWE offer to broaden the scope of our role to include captive management volunteers. In doing so we will request that a FoOBP member with captive management knowledge be included on the selection panel for these volunteers.
- 4) We will continue to coordinate the availability of Willson's house (with the agreement of Barbara) to ensure this facility is available to FoOBP members who have been members up to 1 June 2019, and other projects at the discretion of the Committee when not in use for Barbara's family and friends. DPIPWE volunteers wishing to stay at the Willson's house will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The house will remain available for emergency situations as agreed at the time. Mark will continue to liaise with Barbara to develop a roster for the 2019/20 season.
- 5) Pending formal written agreement on liability for DPIPWE volunteers, the Willson house feed table and observation point will be made available during the 2019/20 season.
- 6) The FoOBP spotting scopes will be provided to the DPIPWE program free of charge, however, maintenance and damage will be paid for by DPIPWE.
- 7) The bikes will be available to all FoOBP members who have been members up to 1 June 2019. Availability for DPIPWE volunteers will be determined once safety and liability issues have been resolved.
- 8) All FoOBP members who have been members up to 1 June 2019 will have free and unlimited access to the 1 South Coast Track NBN. This will also be available to the Willson family and friends, and any other person at the discretion of Mark. The NBN will be made available to DPIPWE volunteers and any other potential users through a pay-wall to help offset costs.

- 9) We will work with Birdlife Australia Threatened Bird Network in conjunction with DPIPW, Cradle Coast NRM and Wild Mob to undertake coordinated surveys of the northern migration route in 2020.
- 10) Under the supervision of PWS Strahan, organise a FoOBP working bee to clean up the old aviaries and infrastructure at Birchs Inlet.
- 11) In conjunction with PWS Huonville, draft a Reserve Activity Assessment to allow for the replacement of the small wooden bird hide with a more suitable structure. DPIPW and other stakeholders will be consulted on the design requirements and funds will be applied for through various sources to build the new hide.

Are there any other projects that you would like to see FoOBP involved in for the benefit of the OBP recovery program?

We would appreciate receiving feedback on these recommendations and any other ideas by cob Monday July 1, so that we can communicate our position to DPIPW at our meeting on the following week.. Please send your feedback to – marg@margcranney.com.au