

Dear LCV community,

The past year has been great for growth of our community and for our impact in protecting biodiversity and regenerating ecosystems across Victoria. Bravo to you! Our shared commitment to private land conservation is not just a decision we voluntarily make but also one we intend to leave for future generations, ensuring that native species and habitats remain protected in perpetuity. Thank you all for the many and varied ways you contribute.

Reflecting on what we have achieved this year, our community and the LCV committee has continued in our commitment to; connect, share, and advocate for the preservation of nature.

Our shared commitment is enabled through the generosity of philanthropy and predominantly to date that is provided through Rendere Environmental Trust and the EcoLands Collective. I take this opportunity to thank some generous contributions from members and of course the time and knowledge our volunteer committee and members contribute.

And here are some key highlights of our collective efforts:

**Advocacy and Achievements:**

- **Land Tax and Rate Exemptions:** Building on the momentum from last year, we successfully advocated for the exemption of land tax on Trust for Nature (TfN) covenants, which took effect in January 2024. This is a significant win, reflecting a shift towards recognising the value of private conservation. Our work to achieve coherent rate exemptions across councils remains ongoing and more complex. This complexity is highlighted with the traffic light map on our website with different councils offering different rebates or none at all to covenant landholders. We are pushing for local councils to reflect on their policy and rates approach given their stated commitments to climate and biodiversity to seek better alignment.
- **Conservation Forums and Webinars:** We have participated in environmental forums such as the ALCA Landholder Forum and the Springsure Hill Landcare Forum. Together with, our "Meet a Member" and "Hot Topic" webinars we continue to succeed in enabling members to share invaluable insights and lessons from their properties. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and these recordings are now available on our YouTube channel. These events and publicity that generate helps spread the word, our profile and to attract members.
- We developed a **Field Day Toolkit** that allows members to host their own local meetups. This initiative fosters local communities among covenant holders, helping them share knowledge and experiences. The toolkit has been trialled in 2024 and will rolled out more broadly in 2025
- **Growing Membership and Collaboration:** We saw steady growth in our community, now counting 140 members across 180 covenants along with some new friends. Our collaborations with key stakeholders, include TfN, DEECA, Landcare Victoria, and ALCA, CMA's and RSV where our General meeting is held and is available for working groups and networking. These organisations share knowledge

and help build a supportive network for conservation efforts across the state. We also build on our work with the **iNaturalist project**, fostering a community of members who are actively documenting and sharing species observations from covenanted lands.

### **Strengthening Governance and Capacity:**

- **Strategic and Member Support Plans:** Following our planning meeting in Bendigo, we have implemented both an Action Plan and a Member Support Plan. These align with our strategic objectives and are designed to guide us through the next few years. Our strategic plan is available online and ensures we continue to make meaningful progress aligned to our mission and rules.
- **Committee Development and Competency:** We completed a Committee Competency Profile to identify skills gaps and strengthen our internal governance. This was a crucial step in preparing for the future growth and to inform resource needs as we grow the needs of members.
- **DGR Application and Funding Initiatives:** We are in the process of applying for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status in our own right. This allows us to accept tax-deductible donations and is a vital step towards ensuring long-term financial sustainability for LCV. In addition, we have launched the GiveNow donation page via our website, receiving generous support from members and supporters.

**Looking Forward:** As we look to the year ahead, three key areas will continue to drive our work:

1. **Advocacy** – We will keep pushing for broader recognition and calling for tangible incentives for private conservation efforts. Addressing the inconsistencies in council rate exemptions will remain a priority as we strive for equity and support for landholders who are making personal sacrifices for the greater good.
2. **Governance** – Strengthening our internal processes and preparing for the opportunities that DGR status brings is critical. We remain committed to good governance and ensuring that our operations are transparent, effective, and aligned with our mission.
3. **Independence** – Securing long-term financial independence remains a focus. As we continue to build our membership and secure partnerships, we look to ensure LCV remains a strong and independent voice for conservation in Victoria.

Mostly however, thank you to our dedicated committee members, volunteers, partners, and supporters. You are the heart and the machine of LCV, and your commitment allows us to continue advocating for a future where biodiversity thrives.

As we face ongoing challenges from climate change, habitat loss, and social shifts, I know that our community can rise to meet these challenges, hold government more accountable and consistent with their stated commitments.

Every covenant represents a step towards preserving the natural world, and together, we are leaving a legacy of hope and regeneration for generations to come.

Thank you all.

Peter Mulherin - President LCV