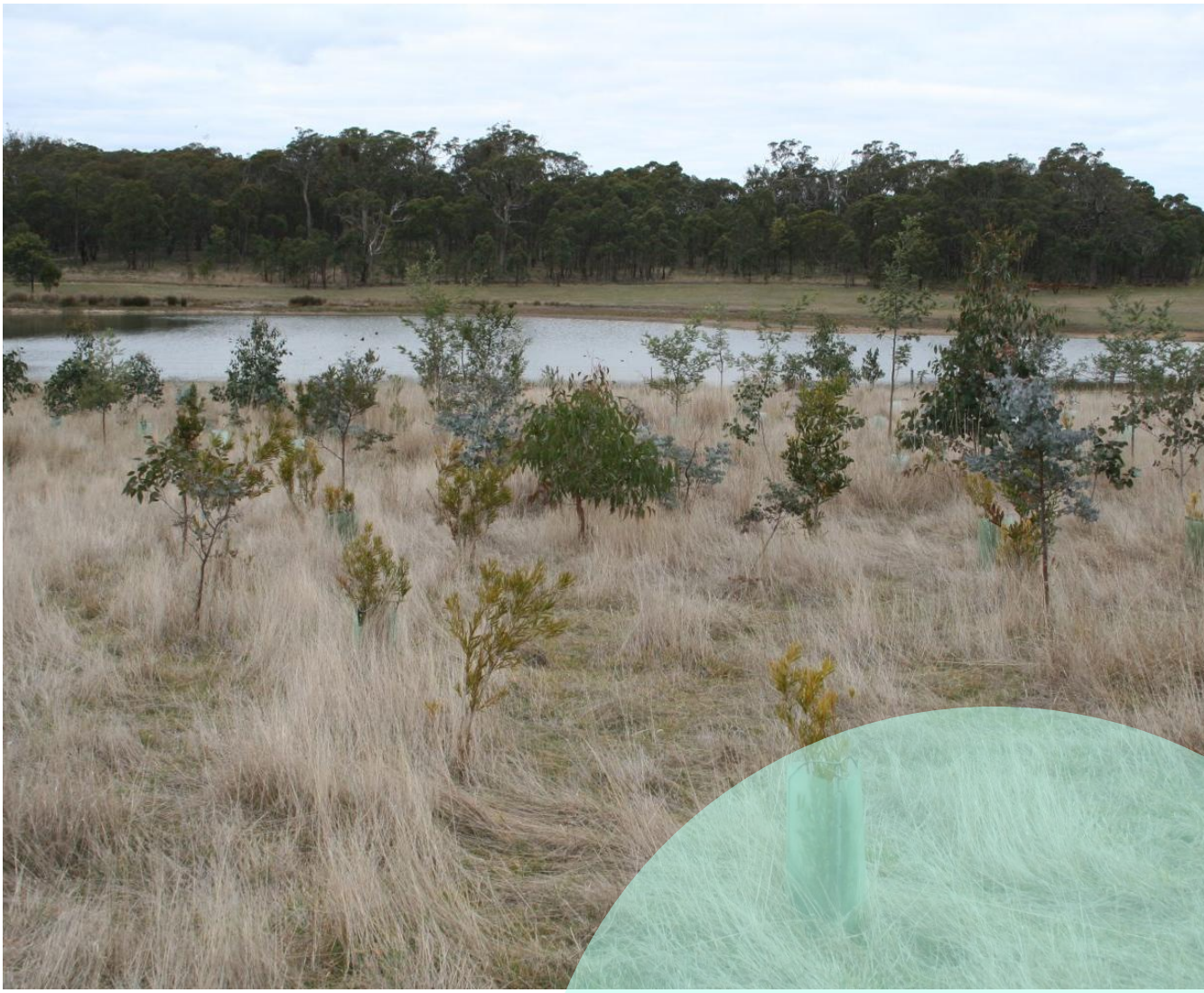

Cobaw Biolink Plan

By: Ammie Jackson and Newham & District Landcare Group

2026

Newham & District Landcare Group

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Introduction

Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) lies in the watershed catchment area of the Campaspe and Maribyrnong rivers and contains a number of areas of significant remnant vegetation (e.g. Hanging Rock Reserve, the Jim Jim, some roadsides and along Monument Creek). NDLG acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Country where this project takes place, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and the Taungurung.

The Cobaw Biolink aims to create a functional landscape connection between the Cobaw State Forest (north) and Macedon Regional Park (south), to aid in preventing further local extinctions of species of native fauna and flora.

Biolinks are areas of remnant vegetation or habitat, such as waterways or stands of paddock trees, that form connections or wildlife corridors to enable native fauna to move freely throughout the landscape to feed, breed and seek protection. Biolinks also contribute to the movement of plants through seed and pollen dispersal, leading to greater resilience and genetic diversity.

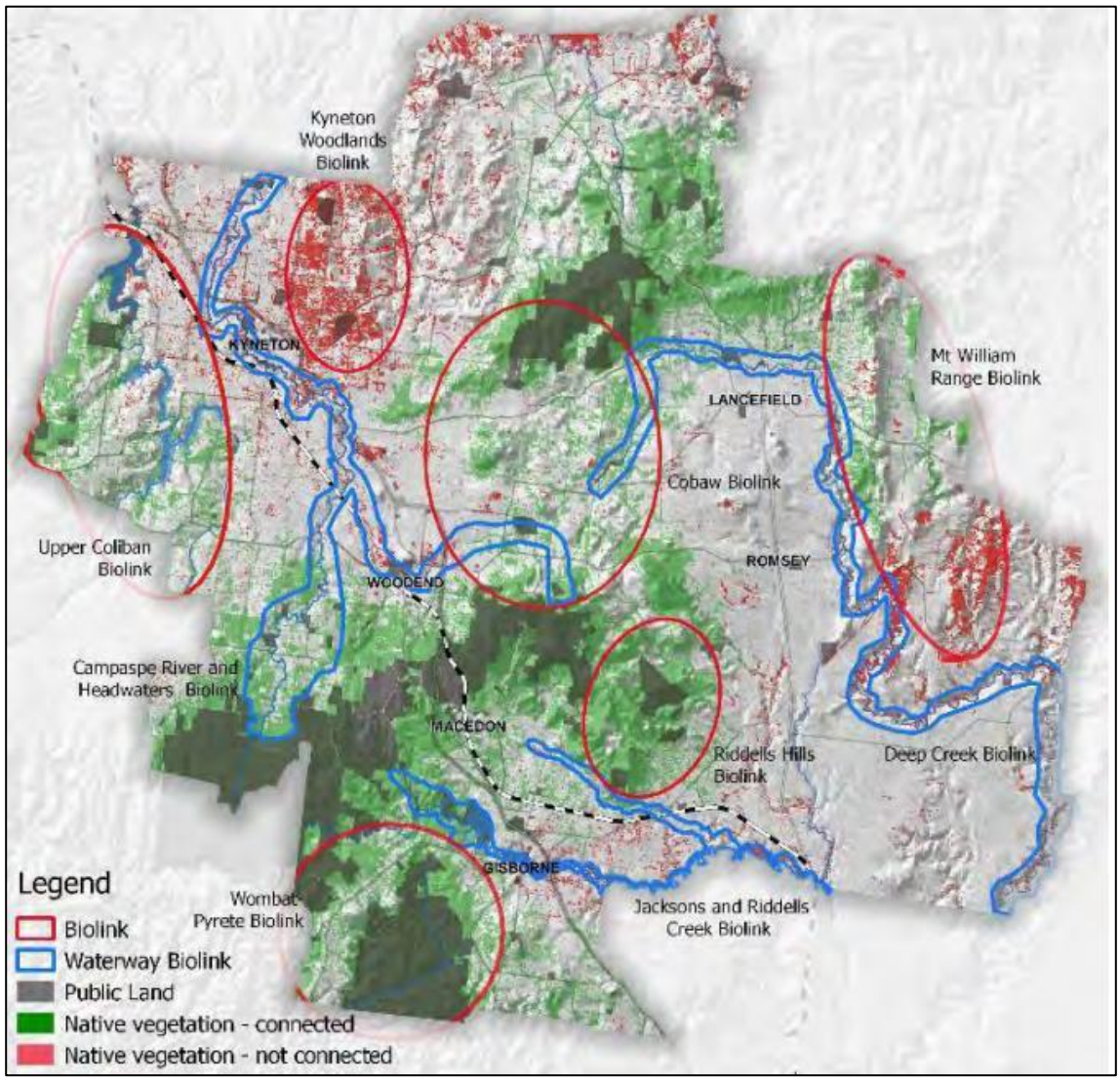
The region is strategically important because of its central position, providing connectivity more broadly within Victoria and also northwards through the Great Eastern Ranges Biolink, which extends all the way up the Great Dividing Range to Queensland.

Significant native animals in this area include the Brush-tailed Phascogale, Greater Glider, Powerful Owl, Barking Owl, Brown Treecreeper, and migratory birds (Swift Parrot, Latham's Snipe). Significant native plants include the Matted Flax-lily, *Dianella amoena* and Slender Daisy, *Brachyscome debilis*.

Brush-tailed Phascogale. Photo by William Terry.

The Cobaw Biolink is one of six priority biolink areas identified in Macedon Ranges Shire Council's Biodiversity Strategy. The Strategy's goal for the Cobaw Biolink is "To establish a network of native vegetation linking Macedon Regional Park with the Cobaw Forest and improve water quality in the Maribyrnong and Campaspe River catchments."

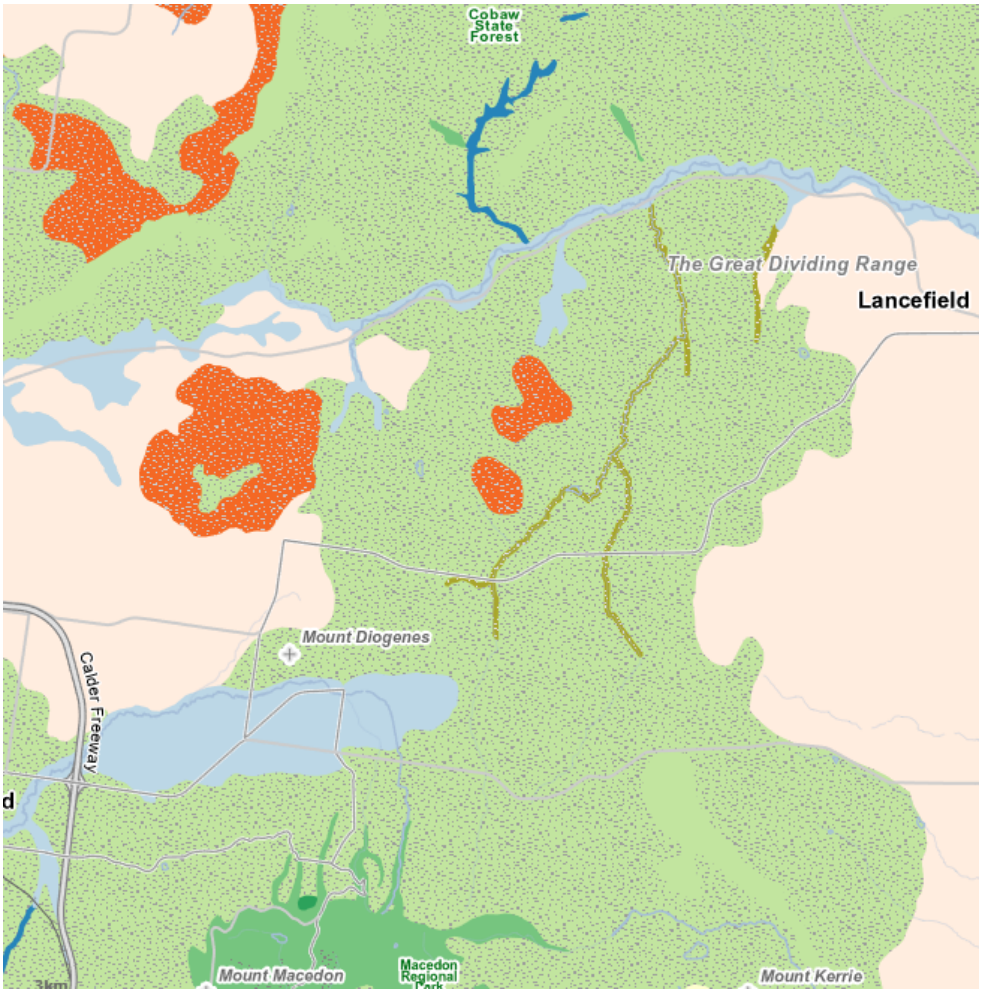
Work has begun on the Deep Creek Biolink and Mt William Range Biolink, situated to the east of the Cobaws. Both biolinks are strategically located to provide connections to patches of large remnant vegetation and waterway corridors. Together, they connect to the Cobaw Biolink, to create a more continuous area of enhanced and connected vegetation across the landscape.



Biolinks in Macedon Ranges Shire. (Macedon Ranges Shire Council Biodiversity Strategy)

The geological diversity and resulting diversity of Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC) present in the Newham district, and the existence of two large areas of remnant vegetation at higher altitudes makes this biolink particularly important in a time of climate change.

The area contains three endangered EVCs - Scoria Cone Woodland, Swampy Riparian Woodland, and Plains Grassy Woodland.



Pre 1750 EVC map. *Beige = Plains Grassy Woodland EVC, Pale Green = Valley Grass Forest EVC, Dark Green = Damp ForestEVC, Orange = Scoria Cone Woodland EVC, Pale blue = Swampy Riparian Woodland EVC.*

Background

NDLG was formed in 2004, by Jim Sansom. NDLG covers 21,800 hectares in the Newham, Cobaw, Hesket and Rochford areas, and is located in two catchment regions. Approximately one third of the NDLG area is in the North Central CMA, and the remaining two-thirds are in Melbourne Water's region (the Port Phillip and Western Port catchment).

NDLG is active across a range of projects, their membership has grown to over 100 families, and they continue to attract new members with regular community engagement events.

The vision for the group is to enhance biodiversity and natural ecosystems within the local environment.

The goals of the group relate to:

- protection and enhancement of remnant vegetation and revegetating areas that will provide links between remnants – the Biolink**.** This encompasses pest plant and animal control, rehabilitation of waterways and roadside activities.
- development of the Newham community through shared involvement in activities that enhance our environment in the broadest sense. This encompasses involvement with Newham Primary School and the Newham Garden Club.

NDLG has a website and distributes a quarterly newsletter. Newham & District Landcare Group (newhamlandcare.info)

In 2021, NDLG's achievements were recognised with an Australian Community Media Landcare Community Group Award.

The Cobaw Biolink Project, also known as the Campaspe – Maribyrnong Headwaters Biolink, commenced in 2005 and continues to be the major project for NDLG. The main activities of the biolink project have centered on pest plant and animal control, revegetation, rehabilitation of waterways, and roadside activities to provide habitat connectivity for native species on both public and private land between Mount Macedon and Cobaw State Forest.

History and achievements of the Cobaw Biolink

NDLG have been engaging directly with landowners and assisting with advice on a range of subjects, including native vegetation, pest management, biolink project development and grant applications.

NDLG member, Penny Roberts, has played a critical role in the Biolink project, spearheading the funding applications and getting landholders involved. Targeted mailouts to landholders have been one approach used; in other instances, door-knocking, events and word of mouth were key methods to get participants interested in participating.

Penny has also been responsible for conducting site assessments and flora surveys on new properties and providing advice on management options and funding opportunities. Melbourne Water's *Livable Communities, Livable Waterways* Program (formally the Stream Frontage Program) has been a major contributor to achieving on-ground works, with landholders entering into contracts directly with Melbourne Water.

The first funding that the NDLG received was a $1000 grant from the Macedon Ranges Shire Council to support a flora and fauna survey along the Dry Creek at Newham. Since then, NDLG have actively sought Government funding to support on-ground works within the Biolink area, resulting in an investment of more than $1 million. This is made up of $535,000 in grant monies and more than $600,000 in matching contributions.

A total of 25 grants have been obtained so far, supporting works on more than 50 private properties, Hanging Rock Reserve and Newham Primary School.

NDLG has been responsible for around 142,000 tubestock being planted in the Cobaw Biolink. Of these, approximately 75,000 tubestock have been distributed as part of grant activities, and another 67,000 via Treeproject, NDLG propagating group volunteers, or commercial growers at rates subsidised by NDLG.

A Communities for Nature grant in 2014 for $157,500 enabled on-ground works on 32 private properties, at Hanging Rock Reserve and roadsides.

Other works have included fencing to protect remnant vegetation, revegetation to enhance or buffer remnant patches (including costs of plants and tree guards or direct seeding), control of rabbits and weeds, two property planning series, educational events and production of a poster about the biolink and what individual landowners can do to enhance it. Natural regeneration of indigenous species is occurring in areas where woody weeds, such as blackberry, gorse and broom are removed, and stock are excluded.

Biolink Boost funding through the Macedon Ranges Shire Council allows NDLG to conduct indigenous plant giveaways to community members in the Cobaw Biolink area. This initiative enables landholders of small properties to be involved in the project and contribute towards creating linkages between larger properties. It creates awareness about the importance of biolinks and indigenous understory species, which are often overlooked. NDLG and Woodend Landcare produced a short video in 2020 - "Landcare ~ Wildflowers of Woodend & Newham on Vimeo" to celebrate the native wildflowers of the region.

Landholders have committed to their projects by providing a co-contribution to their activities, usually in the form of in-kind labour and maintaining projects long-term.

Waterways have been a focus for the Biolink, and Melbourne Water has been a strong supporter of the project. The Livable Communities Livable Waterways Program provided funding directly to landholders for waterway restoration works.

An initiative of NDLG is a video released in 2021, called *"Linking the Landscape – the Cobaw Biolink."* Aiming to engage landholders and residents, making them aware that their contribution to improve connections between Mount Macedon and the Cobaw Range, on both private and public land, no matter how big or small, is environmentally vital. The video involved member families, local government staff talking about climate change, and an ecologist talking about spotlight surveys on Newham's roadsides. To quote Penny Roberts, "the Cobaw Biolink is bigger than any of us, is a model that can be used anywhere…, it builds connections between remnants, and it builds connections within community."

Local schools have had long-term involvement with NDLG and the Cobaw Biolink Project. In particular, the partnership with Newham Primary included the coordination of a propagation group, with Landcare members, students, parents and grandparents growing plants for inclusion in the Biolinks plantings on private properties and the school grounds. Over many years, Newham Primary School students have assisted with biodiversity plantings at the school and other public land sites, installed nesting boxes and learning about wildlife. Braemar College involvement has included students learning about biolinks, undertaking revegetation at the school and a creating a Pollinator Project. NDLG members have also given presentations to Hesket Primary School. A member property in the centre of the biolink and adjacent to Deep Creek hosts field days for landholders and local schools, stressing the importance of biolinks and providing examples of revegetation, landscape restoration and ecological monitoring.

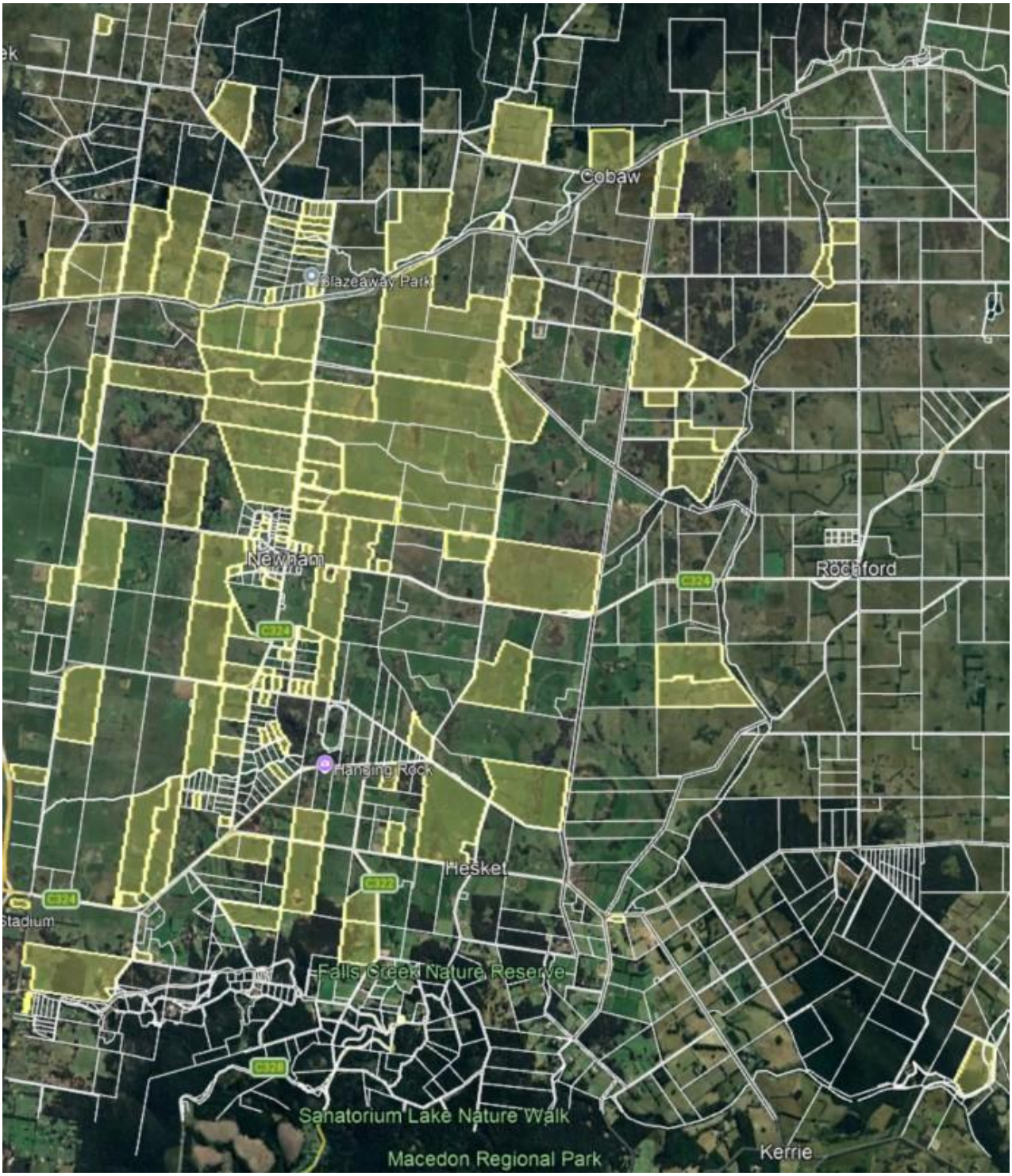
Community events are a fantastic way to keep current members involved, a chance to meet their neighbors and to attract new members who may have future involvement in the Cobaw Biolink. Approximately one third of the Newham community are members of NDLG.

NDLG responds to members' requests for events on a variety of topics including new members dinners, planting days, Clean Up Australia Day, biodiversity surveys, weeding days and expert talks. Training courses, such as the property planning series, have been delivered by NDLG.

Table 1 – On-ground achievements

Properties involved	50+
Seedlings planted	161,000
Fencing (kms)	12
Area protected from grazing (hectares)	19

Map of Biolink Areas



Map of Cobaw Biolink area with participating properties highlighted.

Case study

803 Monument Rd, Lancefield

The property is located to the east of Twin Bridges Reserve, with frontage to Deep Creek. It forms an important link of vegetation along the waterway to the Cobaw State Forest in the north. The vegetation type is mapped as Grassy Forest.

Howard and Janine purchased the 10.5 hectare property in 2004 and started revegetating in the same year. Natural recruitment was achieved by fencing off areas of existing remnant vegetation. With funding and support from Melbourne Water's various Stream Frontage and Rural Land programs, they were able to expand on the plantings over subsequent years and fence off the creek frontage (20 m wide) and the farm dam. Fencing and revegetating inflow and outflow areas has reduced soil erosion, slowed the water flow and reduced damage during flood events.

Plantings in the first year were damaged by wallaby browsing and were deemed unsuccessful. The use of wallaby fence enclosures were used to protect subsequent plantings and ensure they could establish.

In 20 years, over 8000 indigenous plants have been planted, and the property is registered for Land for Wildlife.

Weed control has been carried out for blackberry, hawthorn, gorse, thistles and willow. Weed seed continues to spread from neighbouring properties, and some follow-up maintenance spraying is required annually.

Rabbits have been managed with ferrets and warren destruction.

Some large hollow bearing trees remain on the property. An assortment of nest boxes have been installed to provide habitat for native wildlife. Camera monitoring has revealed a healthy population of Brush-tailed Phascogale (listed as Vulnerable in Victoria). Other wildlife frequently observed include kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, gliders, echidnas and blue-tongue lizards.

Wallaby fence enclosures

Aerial photography of the property 21 years apart

Creekside plantings. Before in 2008 and after in 2025

Dam plantings. Before in 2008 and after in 2025

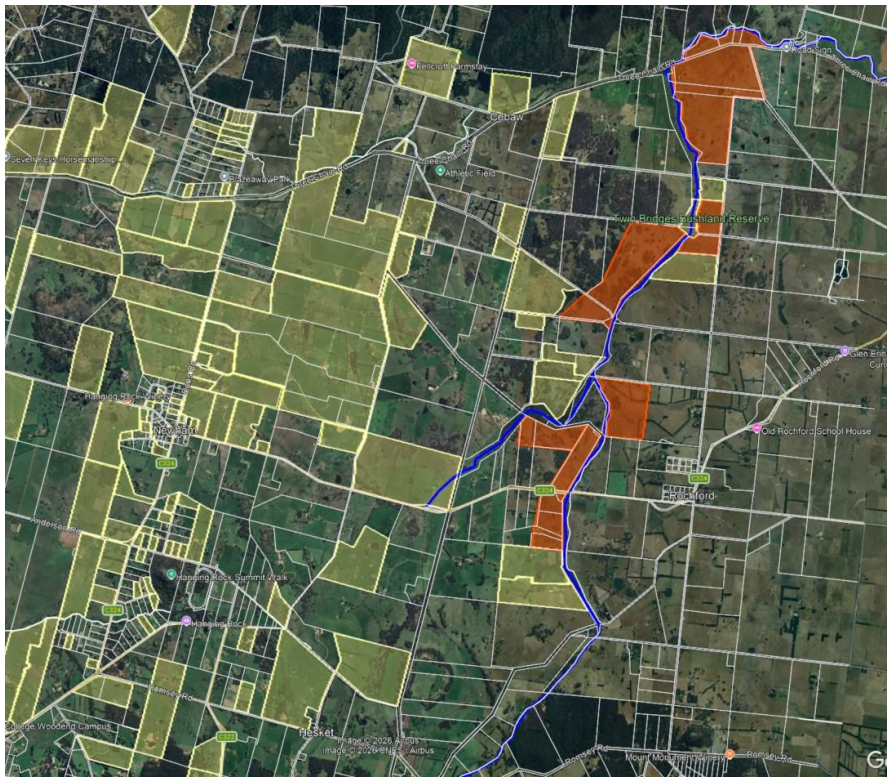
Paddock plantings. Before in 2008 and after in 2025.

Current status and future priorities

NDLG has achieved much in the 20+ years since the project started, and there is still plenty of opportunity for further on-ground works and improvements to the Biolink.

The Cobaw Biolink continues to be the group's flagship project currently and into the future. To further enhance existing habitat values and linkages across the landscape, priorities for engagement will focus on areas along waterways and existing native vegetation. Gap areas along key waterways (Dry Creek, Deep Creek and their tributaries) will be the most strategic areas to focus future works on.

By accessing existing data of areas which have previously been involved in Landcare and Melbourne Water initiatives, the map below indicates the most strategic gap areas within the Cobaw Biolink for future engagement and investment.



Priority areas indicated in orange

Working in partnership with Melbourne Water, NDLG will seek to engage with targeted landholders through various means, such as mailouts and door knocking. The importance of re-engaging with early adopters, as well as making contact with new owners of biolink properties cannot be understated.

Table 2 – Successful grants

Year	Source	Activities	Amount
2005	MRSC	Flora surveys	$1,000
2005	Community Grant. Port Phillip and Maribyrnong CMA	Biolinks works on 5 properties on Deep Creek	$23,100
2005	Melbourne Water	Deep Creek capital works, willow removal	$80,000
2006	EnviroFund Round 7	Biolinks works on 2 properties, biological survey and educational activities.	$26,285
2006	Port Philip and Westernport CMA	Landcare Activities	$300
2006	Community Water Grant	Biolink activities on 2 properties	$12,585
2006	Melbourne Water Community water Grant	Weed control, revegetation along the Creek. Engagement with Newham PS and setting up propagation area.	$7,150
2006	Envirofund Round 8	Fencing remnant, 10,000 tubestock in linking area. Biolinks works on 2 properties.	$34,416
2006	La Trobe University SRC funds	Biological survey	$1,500
2007	NCCMA, 2nd Generation Landcare Grant	Weed control nd revegetation, Camels Hump Creek and tributary of Five Mil Creek	$3,735
2007	DVCS volunteers small equipment grant	Weed control and revegetation equipment	$1,200
2007	EnviroFund round 9	Jim Jim to Deep Creek Linking Corridor	$19,000
2007	EnviroFund round 9	Pest Animal Pilot Project	$23,855
2008	2nd Generation Landcare Grant	Revegetation corridor	$8,184
2008	3rd Generation Landcare Grant	Biolink	$9,042
2009	PPWMA Community Grants Program	Promotion & Development	$500
2010	PPWCMA community grant	Northern hotspots, 5 properties	$38,352
2011	Small equipment grant	Planting equipment	
2012	Communities for Nature grant	HRR weed management and planting of 1200	$5,310
2013	Communities for Nature grant	Stage 2 HRR, planting and weed control	$5,310
2014	Communities for Nature	Progressing biolink at 32 properties. 2 Years of funding	$157,000
2018	Victorian Government - Biodiversity On-ground Action	Revegetation, fencing, gorse control, nesting boxes for Brush-tailed Phascogales, a pole camera for monitoring nest boxes, and a motion-sensor camera for use by members to record wildlife on their property.	$50,000

2022	North Central Catchment Landcare grant	Langethy Creek rehabilitation project.	$17,580
2023	Victorian Landcare Grant	Further enhancement of our Biolink activities. Triangle project on public land on the corner of Anderson and Boundary roads	$19,982
2024	MRSC, Biolink Boost Grant	Plant giveaways to local landholders. Over 4000 seedlings	$5,000
2025	MRSC, Biolink Boost Grant	Enhancing biodiversity of the Cobaw Biolink	$5,000
		TOTAL	**$535,404**

Resources and links

For information on Melbourne Water grants for landholders - https://www.melbournewater.com.au/services/grants/liveable-communities-liveable-waterways-program

Macedon Ranges Shire Council Biodiversity Strategy - https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/About-Council/Our-Council/Strategies-Plans/Biodiversity-Strategy

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 - https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/publications/

Taungurung Country Plan – https://taungurung.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Taungurung_Country-Plan.pdf

NatureKit. Interactive mapping for Victoria's biodiversity values - https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/naturekit

Newham& District Landcare Group - https://newhamlandcare.info/

Upper Deep Creek Landcare Network - https://www.upperdeepcreeklandcare.org.au/home

For information regarding the Deep Creek Biolink - https://biolinksalliance.org.au/deep-creek-biolink