



SEA LIFE CONSERVATION FUND
ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

SACF

Management
Committee 2013**President –**

Claudette Rechterik
SLCF Program
Manager

Vice President –

Dr Sam Gilchrist, Vet -
Macquarie University

Treasurer –

Jade McKellar - **General**
Manager, Tours,
Opera House

Public Officer –

Steve Williams,
Guest Experience
Manager SEA LIFE
Sydney Aquarium

Secretary –

Amy Wilkes, Aquarist, SEA
LIFE Sydney
Aquarium

Ordinary Members:

Anissa Lawrence,
Director, Tierramar
Consulting

Ben Chinnock,
Campaign Manager,
Inspired Adventures

Adam Clifford, IT
specialist, NAB

Tim Marshall –
Online Marketing
Manager, Merlin Ent.
Sydney

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's hard to believe another year has come and gone. I wish I could say that a year's worth of progress has been made within marine conservation.

Unfortunately this is not the case.

We have a State government (and it's not alone) that is intent on cutting back 'green tape', weakening environmental laws and continuing on with 'business as usual' despite the myriad environmental challenges we face. The amnesty on recreational fishing in sanctuary zones within beaches and headlands of NSW Marine Parks is a case in point.

We have a Federal government that is intent on repealing a market-based mechanism, the emissions trading scheme of which the fixed carbon price (not a tax) was a part, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), one of the biggest threats our planet faces; increasing ocean temperatures and making them more acidic. We can't even begin to predict the impact upon our fisheries, yet evidence is clearly showing that things are changing, and fast.

The National Container Deposit Scheme, a 'no-brainer' recycling incentive scheme that has worked for decades in South Australia, is still being hijacked by Coke and the Australian Grocers Association, despite evidence showing it is the most efficient means to improve our low rates of recycling and clean up our trashed green and wild spaces.

But SLCF continues engaging the community to work towards improving the health of our oceans as you'll see in this report.

Our animal adopters, members, corporate sponsors and visitors who donate via our spinners all enable us to continue supporting stewards of the aquatic environment, whether it is research based, through schools, or helping to restore habitat. Every little bit helps.

In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand and we will only understand what we've been taught.

Baba Dioum

Claudette Rechterik

President | SLCF Management Committee

OUR PROJECTS



This year we created the Turtle Watch website www.turtlewatch.org.au in order to communicate the story of our turtles' journeys. You can find where each turtle that we've rescued, rehabbed, and released with a satellite tag is on this site, along with their individual stories. We've also grown the program to incorporate turtles that our other sites in Melbourne, Mooloolaba and Auckland have also released.

Keep an eye out for 'Max's Great Adventure', an epic story of a Loggerhead turtle, which will be coming out as a children's book shortly.



Restoring 50km of freshwater habitat in the Barwon catchment by removing redundant weirs, \$19,000



Figure 1: Woorawadian - after

Our first weir is officially gone!

As part of the 1,000km Habitat Challenge we were successful in receiving a Caring for Country grant which was used to remove the Woorawadian weir on the Barwon river, western NSW.

Approximately 50km of freshwater habitat was restored for native fish (pic left after weir removed).

Barrier removal fits within the Native Fish Strategy & Caring for Country criteria by increasing the extent, condition, connectivity & resilience of native habitat.

Woorawadian weir had been slated for removal by the State Water Corporation as it was deemed an regulated weir that obstructs fish passage into the wider Murray Darling catchment.

Funding for weir removal is extremely limited & generally allocated to just a few projects annually, relative to 800+ weirs needing removal.



Figure 2: Woorawadian - before

Coast Guardians - 2193 Plastic Water Bottle Free



In response to our screening of the documentary ‘Bag it – is your life too plastic?’ schools in the Canterbury area took the ball and ran with it. Led by Sue Holden, Principal of Canterbury High School, all government schools within the Canterbury postcode have agreed to go plastic water bottle free to reduce their plastic footprint. They will be replaced with water refill stations funded by SLCF.

The project will be officially launched as part of Schools Clean Up Australia Day 2014.

Coast Guardians - Holbrook Public School tank installation



Based on the success of the coral reef tank installation at York Public School in 2011, SLCF funded another classroom tank for Holbrook Public School in regional NSW.

The tank will house native freshwater fish, a critically endangered group of animals, and will be used as an educational tool to engage students on the need for healthy habitats to sustain healthy native fish populations. The project is supported by NSW DPI’s Narrandera Fisheries Centre.

CONSERVATION RESEARCH

Can Nemo help his home recover from bleaching? – Drs. Ross Hill & Anna Scott



IN their third project funded by SLCF, Drs. Ross Hill and Anna Scott wanted to investigate whether anemone fish could play a role in ameliorating the risks from increasing sea temperatures.

In a previous study, Anna identified thermal thresholds for 2 species of anemone in the Solitary Islands, NSW. As ocean temperatures rise as part of climate change, amelioration strategies are being investigated to stop sub-tropical and tropical reefs from disappearing.

[The full report from this study can be found here.](#)

Once bitten, twice shy: the impact of shark attacks on public policies in Australia, South Africa and the US – Dr. Chris Neff



The objectives of this original research included obtaining the first qualitative analysis and quantitative data connecting shark attacks and public attitudes with government policies. This information will inform public education campaigns that focus on beach safety and shark conservation efforts as well as offer additional analysis about how risk is perceived by the public.

Since beginning his research Chris has regularly been in the media in response to the rare shark incidents that occur both here in Australia as well as South Africa. He is an amazing communicator and has been extremely effective in engaging the media on shark incident reporting.

[You can see Chris' amazing TED talk here.](#)

Monitoring the health of wild dugongs in Moreton Bay – Dr. Janet Lanyon

In September 2012 the second stage of 2012's health assessment research was carried out. Each year, the team comes together from around Australia; researchers from the University of Queensland, staff from Sea World and a representative from SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium (this year, SLCF).

In order to check the health of a dugong first you need to catch it. The catch team are ready on the boat, their head gear and wetsuits on, looking ready for a game of underwater rugby, and that's almost what they are up for. Dugongs can weigh over 500kgs, so it requires four athletic team members to successfully catch one.

The 2011 floods and high coastal development are having an impact on the dugongs and the seagrass they rely on for food, with accelerated levels of metals already found in dugong tissue. This vulnerability exemplifies a need to protect this species and is a core part of what drives this research, and the researchers.



Each of the 16 dugongs caught on the trip are initially examined, in-water, for basic determinants of health, such as body morphometrics. They are then transferred to the larger research vessel (Sea World 1) for more comprehensive health assessment. Although the capture is done manually, a crane is required to move these large aquatic mammals onto the deck.

Once on deck, the researchers quickly get to work, minimising the time each animal spends out of the water. During sampling, photos are taken to look at the density and position of scratches along the dugongs' body, and monitored to see whether these change with season and differ between gender. Like

their closest land relative (the elephant) dugongs have tusks, which they use for competition and mating.

Janet Lanyon, the head researcher, and her previous honours student Fletcher patiently get blood from inside the pectoral fin. Once blood is collected it is transferred to the floating lab for immediate processing. An ultrasound is done to get internal images and to see if any of the females are pregnant. They found pregnant dugongs in 2008, 2010 and 2011, but unfortunately none this year. It is too early to know if this is a decreasing trend in pregnancy, and whether this is a by-product of the 2011 floods but it is definitely something to keep an eye on. After sampling, the animal is weighed and returned to the water.

Monitoring plastic ingestion rates of seabirds – Dr. Jennifer Lavers & Ian Hutton



Dr. Jennifer Lavers of Monash University has been running the longest plastic ingestion monitoring project with her Lord Howe Island shearwater research.

This year, its 9th, showed more sad news. Rates of plastic ingestion by shearwaters are increasing. A dead 4 month old shearwater chick was found with over 270 pieces of plastic in its guts, mostly from plastic bottle lids of all different colours. The mothers pick the plastic up from the ocean surface and feed it to their babies. Despite having a full tummy, the chick had no nutrients to enable it to grow and thrive. And sadly, this is more the norm rather than the exception.



Comments from Jennifer about the research:

“Flesh-footed Shearwater chicks were captured on Lord Howe Island in late-April 2013 shortly before their first-ever flight out to sea. The species has been closely monitored by Dr. Jennifer Lavers and Ian Hutton (Lord Howe Island Museum curator) ever since it was discovered the birds ingest plastic debris (mistaken for food floating on the ocean surface) in 2001. Over the past decade, the number of chicks ingesting plastic increased rapidly until **in 2012, all birds were found to contain at least some plastic**. April 2014 will mark the 10-year anniversary of dedicated data collection on plastic ingestion, a project that would not have reached this landmark without the support of the Sea Life Conservation Fund. The results of this world-first, long-term study will become available to the public when they are published late next year.”

Jennifer works as a full-time scientist in oil pollution research and carries out this project in her own time and often at her own expense. **We’d like to say a huge thanks to Jennifer for her dedication** to our marine wildlife and its protection.

COMMUNITY & EVENTS

Bag it – Is your life too plastic?



On Thursday 25 October 2012, hosted a screening of the popular documentary ‘Bag It – is your life too plastic?’ which was attended by 45 educators including primary and secondary school principals,

teachers, university and TAFE lecturers. The aim of the event was to engage the wider community on the issue of plastic pollution in our oceans.

The response to the event was extremely positive with many attendees wanting to action in their institutions to reduce their plastic footprint. The work being done with schools in the Canterbury postcode was an outcome of this event.

Making a splash in the Bridge to Beach paddling event – February 2013



In February this year, Tom Simmat, ultra-marathon paddler and nautical architect, paddled a kayak in the 'Bridge to Beach' event between Sydney Harbour Bridge and Little Manly beach. Only difference this year, was that it was **in a kayak made out of over 1,000 plastic bottles.**

SLCF were looking for an innovative way to engage the community on the issue of plastic pollution in our oceans. So in January, Claudette began collecting plastic bottles from the harbor, parks and even from

the local community's clean ups.

It took Tom, with a load of help from his family, over 100 hours and 1,000 plastic bottles to build the boat. Over half of the bottles collected were for water.

The aim of the initiative was to gather support for a National Container Deposit Scheme, an incentivized recycling scheme where you get 10c refund for depositing your container. Over 500 signatures were gathered on race day in support for the CDS. And the boat came in about half way, way above our expectations!

The boat is currently on display at Manly SEA LIFE Sanctuary. Thanks to Tom and his family for their amazing support and efforts!

Clothes swap @ Madame Tussauds – March 2013

In March this year, SLCF hosted a clothes swap fundraiser as a way of celebrating recycling and sustainability. Over 40 women joined us in the A-list room along with Cate Blanchet, Miranda Kerr and Johnny Depp and swapped til they dropped (pic right).



For some ladies it was their first time, but all said that it was a great way to rejuvenate their wardrobe, not only saving their wallets but also the environment.

Hundreds of millions of kilos of fabric are tossed into landfill each year. Clothes swap are a great way to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Meet the Scientist – throughout 2012/13

We had a range of amazing scientists to speak at our monthly 'Meet the Scientist @ SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium' events. We'd love to say a huge thanks to:

- **Dr. Ross Hill** – Climate change and our oceans – Aug 2012
- **Dr. Chris Neff** – 'Why Australia's shark nets are worse than Japanese whaling boats' – Sept 2012
- **Marty Garwood** – 'Cephalopods: are they the primates of the ocean?' – Oct 2012
- **Dr. Amy Smoothey** – Bull sharks in Sydney Harbour – Nov 2012
- **Kate Lee** – Assessing the viability of releasing captive-bred wobbegong sharks – Feb 2013
- **Dr. Helene Marsh** – The challenges of conserving dugongs – March 2013
- **Dr. Jennifer Lavers** – Plastic ingestion by Australian seabirds – May 2013



Figure 3: Dr Amy Smoothey with bull shark

Each event had between 60 – 80 people with over 100 attending Amy's bull sharks talk! Our sharks are definitely popular. Keep an eye on our website for Meet the Scientist 2014.



David Suzuki visits Darling Harbour - September 2013

On 20 September this year world renowned environmentalist, David Suzuki, came to visit as part of a visit to Australia for EcoXpo.

We were delighted to also be joined by 40 students from Canterbury Girls High and Ashbury Public due to their involvement in the '2193' plastic reduction initiative.

David, who was on a very tight schedule, generously gave us 30

minutes of his time on the deck of the beautiful 'Yukon'. All were enthralled by David's incredible storytelling. And he was just as interested in the kids as they were of him.

National Network of Marine Parks announcements – June 2013



SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium was the chosen location for Minister Burke (of the previous government) to make both announcements on the National network of marine parks.

The National network of marine parks is a significant step for Australia, a country with the largest marine estate in the world.

It is important that these marine parks are mandated to secure protection for parts of our coast into the future.

TAKING ACTION FOR OCEANS

Our Conservation Corner offers our visitors an opportunity to engage with the many issues our oceans face and to take action. This year we gathered 5,000 signatures over 5 campaigns consisting of:

- Banning the practice of shark finning globally
- Saving our marine sanctuary zones
- Banning witches hat crab traps to save turtles from drowning
- Implementing a national container deposit scheme to help clean up plastic pollution
- Supporting a national network of marine parks

Huge thanks to all our visitors who took the time to let our leaders know they support action to conserve and protect our oceans and the species that live within them.

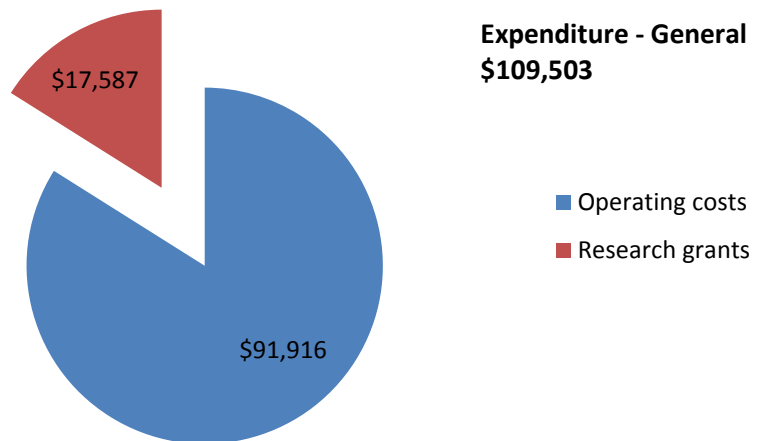
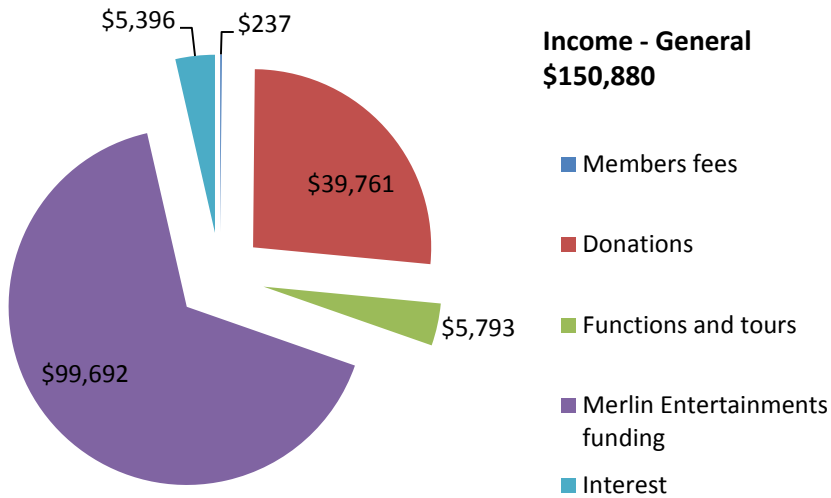
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

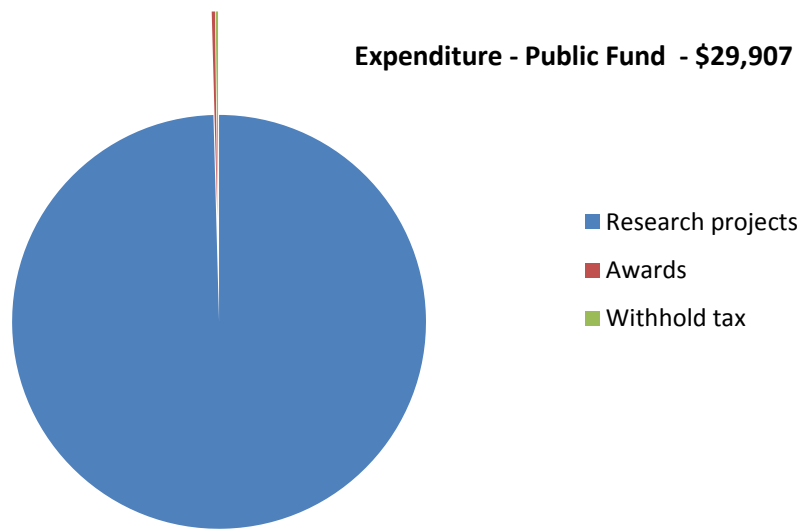
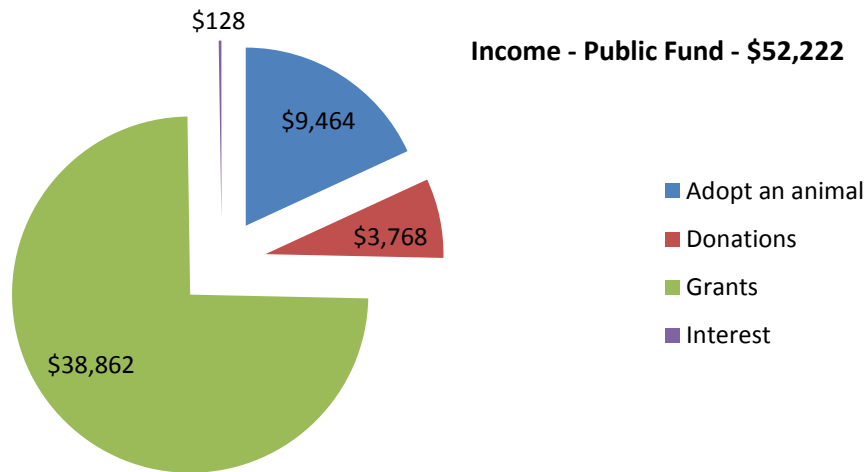
Auditor's Report

I have audited the Income Statement and Balance Sheet together with the Notes to the Financial Statements and confirm that in my opinion they give a true and fair view of the financial position and performance of SEA LIFE Conservation Fund Inc. for the year ended 30 June 2012.

Steve Dafnakis

1st October 2013





For the financial year 2012/13 the SLCF Inc. Public Fund expended \$29,851.50 of funding for five projects:

1. 1,000km Habitat Challenge – restoring freshwater habitat - \$19,000
2. Monitoring plastic ingestion rates of Australian seabirds - \$4,000
3. Monitoring the health of wild dugongs in Moreton Bay - \$5,000
4. Coast Guardians – water refill stations - \$1776.50
5. Australian Marine Science Student Awards - \$75

Thank you



Once again, a huge thank you to all our animal adopters, visitors who donate to our spinners, members & sponsors for enabling us to fund the work we do. Particular thanks go to SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium (Merlin Entertainments) who cover a large % of our operational costs which we would not be able to survive without.

Thanks also to our many volunteers who drop in and out but provide a huge array of value to our organisation; whether it's updating our website, IT, or design, it's all very valuable work that we as a one full-time equivalent operation can't always get to.

How you can help

Become a member for just \$10 per month. **Every dollar raised goes directly to our projects** as our admin costs are covered by our main sponsor, Merlin Entertainments.

Attend one of our events – all proceeds raised from our events go straight back into our projects.

Adopt an animal or Sponsor a turtle tag to enable us to continue monitoring our rescued turtles once released back into the wild.

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

You can do all of the above including making a general donation or learning more about SEA LIFE Conservation Fund via our website www.SEALIFEconservation.org.au.

We look forward to updating you on exciting upcoming events in 2014!

Claudette Rechterik

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rechterik".

SLCF Program Manager & President of SLCF Management Committee