



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: Ian Higgins, VIC

Category: Australian Government Individual Landcarer

Even before Landcare officially began, Ian Higgins was an active Landcarer in Central Victoria. Since then Ian's growing knowledge of Australian flora and his passion for urban creek renewal have seen him work tirelessly with government agencies and neighbouring landholders to support more sustainable practice in Victoria.

Ian was clearing weeds and planting trees on his parents' property along the Jim Crowe Creek nearly 50 years ago. He carried out his first direct seeding experiment in 1982 at his own property at Yandoit, successfully reintroducing indigenous shrub and herb species. In 1984, he began creating a stand of species-rich native vegetation on the roadside verge outside his house in Castlemaine, and lobbied for funding to improve the condition of the local creeks, which had been severely degraded by a century of gold mining. The money came through in 1986 for a project that employed six people full-time removing weeds and revegetating the creek-side public land.

His efforts coordinating multiple Landcare groups in the newly amalgamated Mount Alexander Shire resulted in the shire's commissioners allocating funding for the area's first Environmental Action Plan in 1996. In 2005, Ian assisted the development of a shire community plan to improve environmental outcomes, resulting in the establishment of a community-based Environmental Advisory Committee. The Committee's 2010 State of the Environment Report and 2011 Environment Strategy both emphasised the need to support Landcare groups, and Mount Alexander Shire Council now has one of the highest densities of such groups in Australia.

Ian co-founded the Friends of Campbells Creek in 2000 in partnership with local water authority Coliban Water, focusing on replacing the choking infestations of weeds of national significance with indigenous vegetation.

Ian's depth of experience, enthusiasm and good humour have played an important part in the Friends becoming one of Victoria's most successful groups with a financial membership of 72 in 2017.

Thirty-two years after starting his creek works, he and the group have achieved a remarkable transformation. There are now very few willows remaining along the creek, blackberry and gorse are virtually eradicated and the land is covered in much more diverse, self-regenerating native vegetation.

Now well regarded as a vegetation management specialist, Ian works strategically against the emerging invasions of American stipoid grasses and carpetweed, lobbying road authorities to prevent the spread of along highways which threatens Central Victorian honey production and native vegetation. His real passion though is re-establishing viable populations of the native plant species that disappeared during and after the devastating gold rush of the 1850s. Along 'his' patch of creek he's added an extra 28 species. He even includes orchids and grass trees in his experiments!

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





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Ian pioneered Landcare style engagement with local primary school children during the 1986 Creekside revegetation project. A generation later, the local childcare centre holds bush kindergarten sessions among the resulting 32-year-old revegetation. Another of his initiatives, the 1990 Forest Creek Revegetation Project, saw every student from every primary school in the district bussed in to plant at least one tree seedling, in an area that lacked any significant canopy cover since the mining era.

Ian is still very much getting his hands dirty and leading by example, averaging more than 16 hours a week working on the creeks on top of full-time work. Drive past Campbells Creek on a weekend and you'll likely see him dealing with weeds or sowing native plant seeds.

Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2018 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

Ends

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Web Summary

Ian 'Higgo' Higgins' knowledge of Australian flora and his passion for urban creek renewal have seen him work tirelessly with government agencies and neighbouring landholders to support sustainable practice in Victoria. His efforts coordinating multiple Landcare groups in the newly amalgamated Mount Alexander Shire resulted in the shire's commissioners allocating funding for the area's first Environmental Action Plan in 1996. In 2005, Ian assisted the development of a shire community plan to improve environmental outcomes, resulting in the establishment of a community-based Environmental Advisory Committee. The Committee's 2010 State of the Environment report and 2011 Environment Strategy both emphasised the need to support Landcare groups, and Mount Alexander Shire council now has one of the highest densities of such groups in Australia.

Pull-out quote:

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