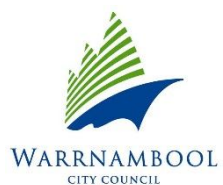


Completion Report: 2016-2017 Breeding Season



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Cover Image One and Two: Volunteers arrive on Middle Island
Image Three: Avis arrives in Warrnambool.

Introduction

In October 2016 the Middle Island Project (the Project) celebrated its 10th anniversary. During that time a number of significant goals have been achieved with the main being the ongoing protection and expansion of the colony of Little Penguins who call the Island home.

The Middle Island Project is overseen by the Middle Island Project Working Group (MIPWG), with the responsibility for implementation of the 'Warrnambool Method' being shared between Warrnambool City Council (WCC) and Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Network (WCLN). WCC is responsible for the care, maintenance and wellbeing of the Maremma Guardian dogs as well as the tourism/business aspects of the Project. The penguin population monitoring program is conducted by the WCLN in accordance with the WCLN Middle Island Little Penguin Monitoring Volunteer Guide.

The Middle Island Strategic Plan was endorsed in 2014 providing a framework for the conservation of the Little Penguin colony on Middle Island. This Middle Island Completion Report summarises the key results, milestones and achievements for the Project during the last 12 months and provides a project evaluation for the 2016-2017 season in line with the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2014-19.

The Completion Report considers the objectives and deliverables achieved, financial performance, media attention evoked, risk management, as well as identifying issues and incidences along with the management responses implemented. This Completion Report has been prepared with input from WCC, WCLN and members of the MIPWG.



Image Four: Eudy and Tula in new purpose built shelters.

Highlights and Innovations

Highlights and innovations of the project in 2016-17 include:

- No reported incidents of fox access to the Island or predation on the seabirds while the Maremma Guardian dogs have been present on the Island.
- The second new Maremma puppy was purchased from Lurgenglare Maremmas, the same breeders from whom Eudy, Tula and Amor were purchased. It arrived at Flagstaff Hill (FSH) on the 16th September and has commenced its training with FSH staff and existing dogs. A public vote took place to name the new puppy. The same process was followed as when Amor was named with just under 100 entries received and a judging panel short listed public vote. As a result of the voting process the puppy has been named 'Avis'.
- A new succession plan is being prepared to provide direction for the dog management component of the project. As a first step each of the dogs are being assessed to determine their suitability as either a guardian or ambassador dog. A comprehensive review of the current dog training principles will be undertaken and protocols established in regards to the succession planning and retirement of the dogs.
- A number of research programs have taken place on the island in the past year. Melanie Wells from Wild Reach has conducted two projects: The first involved conducting an island wide burrow census in order to map the distribution of nesting seabirds on the island and enable the monitoring of changes over time. This project also collaborated with Dr. Daniel Ierodiaconou and his team at Deakin University who completed a drone survey. This drone survey will be used to map the colony and overlay the distribution of nests, as well as provide a useful means of vegetation identification and mapping. The second project involved investigating the foraging ecology of 5 pairs of nesting penguins (10 individuals) equipped with GPS loggers and was conducted in collaboration with Professor John Arnould from Deakin University. This project will provide insights into the at sea movements and behaviours of the penguins, which will aid in both the understanding and implementation of management strategies to conserve the birds and their habitat. Both projects are currently at data analysis stage and the results are expected to be published in a peer reviewed article in the future. Deakin University PhD candidate Katherine Brownlie deployed a song recording metre at Middle Island over the summer breeding season. The data collected will contribute to her overall project, which is to investigate the drivers of population change in the short tailed shearwater. It is expected that she will repeat this fieldwork the following season. Her fieldwork on Middle Island was conducted by Melanie Wells.
- Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare received funding to employ a Penguin Monitoring Coordinator to oversee community volunteers undertaking data collection. Melanie Wells from Wild Reach was employed for this position.
- The Community continue to be highly supportive of the project. The "Meet the Maremma" tours continue to be extremely popular with the extended tour season again running from December to March. Seventy tours were conducted this summer allowing 1253 people to visit the island. This figure was down on the previous year's numbers of 1509 people. The total income from tour ticket sales for the 2016/17 season was \$19,047, this figure is up from last year \$18,080 and is due to the increase in price for the tours implemented at the start of the tour season (this figure does not include costs associated with running the tours).
- The project was a finalist in the Victorian Regional Achievement Awards and nominated for the Parks Victoria Environment Sustainability Award. Two MIPWG members John Sutherland and Melanie Wells were recognised for their individual contributions in the Volunteers category.
- The project was presented at the St Kilda Penguin Symposium with the talk "*Penguins, puppies and people: the real story of the Middle Island Maremma Project*". The project also has

had a paper accepted by the peer-reviewed journal *The Victorian Naturalist* called "*The Little Penguin on Middle Island, Warrnambool, Victoria: an update on population size and predator management*".

- The project's 10th Anniversary was reached in October 2016. A significant milestone for the project with continued positive results from the use of the Maremma dogs to protect the Little Penguins

Penguin and Breeding Monitoring

Penguin monitoring is divided into two components as recommended by Phillip Island Nature Parks: penguin arrival counts and breeding monitoring. Penguins mainly access Middle Island during spring and summer months for the purpose of breeding and moulting. Although dependant on environmental conditions, this is usually between August and March. Penguins will remain mostly at sea for the remainder of the year. Counting arriving penguins at Middle Island during breeding season gives an indication of the size of the penguin colony and their ability to withstand threats such as fox predation, food shortages and illness. Monitoring breeding involves locating, microchipping and tracking penguin breeding pairs and their eggs/chicks. This enables us to determine whether or not the chicks hatch successfully and survive for long enough to live independent of their parents as well as follow the progress of chicks when they return to breed.

After disruptions to the increase in the population in 2013/14 (environmental factors) and 2015/16 (disturbance on the island the night of expected peak count), the Little Penguin population is again showing good signs of recovery and growth.

The arrival counts for the 2016-17 breeding season are shown in Figure 1. Points to note:

- The use of Maremma guardian dogs began in 2006 and records from that breeding season until the 2016-17 season show the penguin colony size has significantly increased. In 2013-14 and in 2015-16 the colony dropped in size. In 2013-14 this was attributed to a rise in water temperatures and associated changes in food availability. In the 2015-16 the decrease was attributed to a large film crew working on the island the night of the count. This night was expected to see the numbers for that season peak; however the disturbance on the island from the film crew is believed to have distorted the figures with the true peak not being monitored.
- Since the 2014-15 season the arrival counts have been conducted by volunteers positioned in four different sites on the island. Previous to this, counts had been undertaken at six different arrival sites. However due to safety concerns and low arrival numbers at two of the site the number of count sites was reduced to four..
- From the time that the first penguin is sighted, volunteers count the number of penguins that arrive onto the Island for a one hour period. With this data, a formula is used to predict the total number of penguins arriving on the Island for that given night. This formula, developed by researchers from Phillip Island Nature Park, estimates that 60% of the nightly arriving penguins will arrive within the first hour of the first penguin sighted arriving.
- Over the 2016-17 breeding season, eight arrival counts were conducted between 19th October 2016 and 27th February 2017. Two arrival counts were cancelled due to adverse weather, and a further two were postponed due to predicted storms and unfavourable weather.
- The peak number of penguin arrivals occurred on the 5th December count when 109 penguins arrived during the count, giving a predicted total arrival number of 181.67. This is a significant increase from last year (64 penguins) and also from the beginning of the project, where a peak number of four penguins were recorded in 2005 (see Figure 2 for arrival numbers since the beginning of the Project).

- The penguin arrival counts for the 2016-2017 breeding season have increased on the previous year. As it is believed the 2015-16 figures were distorted due to the film crew being on the island on the night of the expected peak, the increase in 2016-2017 is consistent had the 2015-16 peak been observed. The peak estimated arrival count of 182 is the same as the 2010-2011 season and very close to our project peak of 190 in 2011-2012.

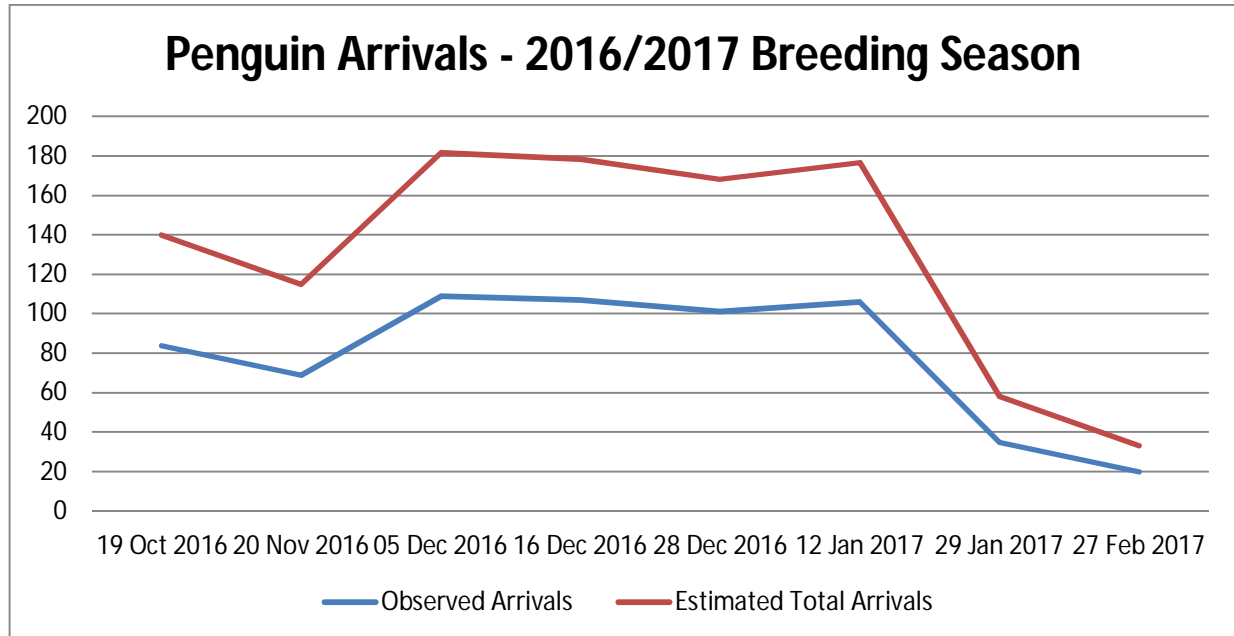


Figure 1. Observed arrival numbers and estimated arrival numbers throughout the 2016-2017 breeding season.

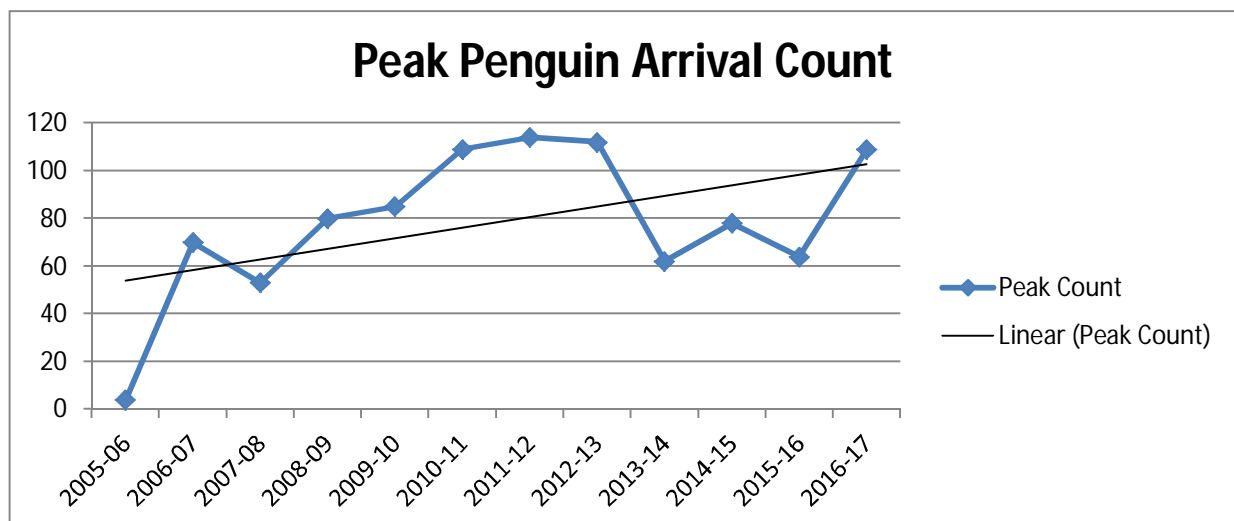


Figure 2. Observed arrival numbers 2005/2006 – 2016/2017



Image Five: Volunteers prior to a penguin arrival count.

Penguin breeding was monitored by undertaking thirteen breeding surveys. The surveys are conducted during the day by a small team of trained volunteers. Volunteers must have some level of animal handling and have undergone ethics training with Phillip Island Nature Parks in order to do this. The process of conducting a breeding survey involves systematically checking each artificial nest, and any natural nest which may indicate signs of activity (i.e. fresh poo, feathers, scratchings outside entrance). The nests are checked for attendance, if there is penguins inside they are checked for their breeding status and scanned for a microchip. If it is a new bird (i.e. no microchip) then a small microchip is inserted by a trained volunteer following procedures employed by Phillip Island Nature Parks. The breeding surveys were conducted between 14 October 2016 and 25 February 2017. During breeding monitoring, 36 breeding pairs were recorded, 30 eggs were found, and 50 chicks were recorded, all of which were assumed to have successfully fledged. These numbers were again higher than the previous year, which also indicated that the population is continuing to increase.

One deceased penguin chick was found during the season, however on investigation it was concluded that the chick had died from malnourishment. There was no evidence of canine predation over the 2016-17 breeding season. Monitoring for fox predation takes place almost daily.

Further scientific research on the little penguin colony was undertaken during the 2016-17 season. Melanie Wells from Wild Reach, in collaboration with Professor John Arnould and Dr. Daniel Ierodiaconou from Deakin University completed an island wide burrow census. This involved physically checking every single burrow on the island with a burrow scope, recording its status and what species was nesting in it, as well as taking a GPS location of each nest. This was done in order to map the density and distribution of active and non-active nests which can be used for future nest monitoring. Island-wide access became achievable this season with the invention of make shift weight distributing shoes. These shoes are old tennis rackets which are strapped to the feet of the user, this allowed better distribution of weight which allowed traversing over sensitive areas that traditionally have been inaccessible due to the soft nesting substrate and the likelihood of collapsing nests. Accompanying this project, an island wide drone survey was conducted which will aid in mapping the colony. The drone survey will also be used as a means of identifying and recording distribution and density of vegetation types on the island, in particular noxious weeds which will aid in deciphering best management approaches.

A foraging ecology study was also conducted. In this study five breeding pairs were selected and equipped with GPS loggers. Pairs were selected based on having newly hatched chicks, which meant that the adults would only go for over-night foraging trips, allowing easy recapture. Two foraging trips from each individual were recorded, however the GPS device from one bird fell off at sea and so data was only collected from nine individuals. This tracking study was conducted to gain a greater understanding of the at sea movements and foraging behaviour of Middle Island's breeding little penguins. Both studies were covered under permits through the Department of Land, Water and Planning and Deakin University Animal Ethics Committee (when applicable). Data from these studies are still being processed and it is expected a publication will come of them as well as improving monitoring techniques and gaining a greater understanding of the penguin colony.



Image Six: Little Penguin on Middle Island

Key Objectives and Deliverables Achieved

The Middle Island Project Strategic Plan 2014-2019 outlines the key objectives and deliverables for the Project. Table 1 details the objectives, achievements and project deliverables over the previous 12 months. Again the MIPWG set out to achieve a high number of deliverable/objectives during 2016-17.

Table 1: Objectives and achievements for the 2016-17 breeding season

Deliverable	KPI	Responsibility	Outcomes
<i>Increase the size of the Middle Island Little Penguin colony</i>	<i>Penguin arrival count estimates indicate that a peak number of at least 180 penguins are arriving to Middle Island in the breeding season</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>The increased numbers for the 2016-2017 season show excellent signs of a growing population.</i>
<i>Undertake regular penguin arrival counts and breeding monitoring</i>	<i>Provision of penguin monitoring data annually</i>	<i>WCLN</i>	<i>8 arrival counts were conducted in 2016-2017, which is one less than last year. However four proposed counts were cancelled due to either, bad weather, predicted storms or the channel not being safe to cross.</i>
<i>Manage risk of vandalism/unauthorised access to the island by educating the community through implementing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan</i>	<i>Establish a baseline of the number and type of incidents that occur</i> <i>Trialling different management/response methods for incidents of unauthorised access to Middle Island</i>	<i>Tourism Services/City Sustainability</i>	<i>In 2015/16 there was one incident of trespassing on the island, this season there 20 recorded incidents which mainly took place over the peak summer period. This sharp increase in trespassing on the island has raised concern for the MIPWG and strategies are being discussed to be implemented before the 2017/18 season.</i>
<i>Minimise incidents of canine predation on Middle Island Little Penguins</i>	<i>Maremma Guardian dogs placed on Middle Island for 70% of the Little Penguin breeding season as per the Project Works Plan</i> <i>No discoveries of injured/deceased Little Penguins with evidence of canine predation</i>	<i>Tourism Services</i> <i>All</i>	<i>The Maremmas spend about 75% of their time on the Island during the breeding season. The other 25% is divided between Doug and Marcelle Maclean's farm at Grassmere and Flagstaff Hill.</i> <i>There were no reported discoveries of injured/deceased Little Penguins with evidence of canine predation. One deceased fledgling was found on the island and was thought to have died from malnourishment. There were no injuries to indicate the chick was a victim of predation. In addition to this a number of Shearwaters and one penguin were also found to have perished on the island, again there was no sign of canine predation with these deaths.</i>

<i>Monitor canine activity along the foreshore and, where resources allow, take actions to eradicate foxes near Middle Island</i>	<i>Record, monitor and report Canine activity near Middle Island.</i>	<i>City Infrastructure</i>	<p><i>Monitoring for fox predation happens almost daily.</i></p> <p><i>No evidence of fox predation on Middle Island was recorded by Warrnambool City Council Environment Officers, Flagstaff Hill staff or Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare.</i></p>
<i>Create a one-stop-shop website for the Middle Island Maremma Project. This will be a platform for spreading project information, accepting donations, advertising tourism activities, promoting opportunities for business sponsorship and attracting project volunteers</i>	<i>Middle Island Maremma Project website developed and actively managed.</i>	<i>City Sustainability</i>	<p><i>Traffic to the www.warrnamboolpenguins.com.au continues to increase.</i></p> <p><i>Between July 1 and March 31, the site recorded 61,712 sessions (up from 40,768 vs the same time last year) with 52,236 unique users (up from 32,271) and 141,310 total page views (up from 111,896).</i></p> <p><i>About 100 people visit the site every day. This rose to about 300 people per day around the time of the puppy naming competition and during the summer tourist season.</i></p> <p><i>The site's busiest day was on January 8, where the site saw 5175 sessions following a short video posted on Facebook by "Did You Know – Video" attracted more than 13 million views. This was shared by George Takei (actor from Star Trek) which generated many of these views.</i></p>
<i>Create a governance structure to manage donations and funding.</i>	<i>Appropriate governance structure created.</i>	<i>City Sustainability</i>	<p><i>The Governance Structure implemented in 2015/16 for the group continued this year. The role of the groups Chair and Finance Coordinator remain unchanged.</i></p> <p><i>Chair – Anne Wallis - Deakin University</i></p> <p><i>Finance Coordinator – Rob Wallis (with Jenny Waterhouse as WCC consultant)</i></p> <p><i>Through the Warrnambool penguins website visitors continue to have the opportunity to donate to the project.</i></p>

<i>Implement the Business and Tourism Plan and use this to secure additional funding and income.</i>	<i>Actions from the Business and Tourism Plan implemented and reviewed annually.</i>	<i>Tourism Services</i>	<p><i>Public Programs continue to be offered by Flagstaff Hill in relation to the project.</i></p> <p><i>The agreement with Petstock Warrnambool continues. This secures free food, grooming and dog tablets. A discount is also offered on other project related items.</i></p> <p><i>The MIPWG is investigating other options for sponsorship in the future.</i></p>
<i>Community are invited to events/activities with information on the project and the impacts of introduced species on biodiversity (such as Meet the Maremma tours)</i>	<p><i>Minimum 15 events/activities held annually</i></p> <p><i>Minimum 250 attendees at events/activities</i></p>	<i>Tourism Services/WCLN</i>	<p><i>70 Meet the Maremma Tours were held over summer. A total of 1253 people attended. .</i></p> <p><i>An end of Season celebration is being planned to be held in conjunction with a function to celebrate 10 years of the project.</i></p>
<i>Support volunteers and build community capacity in conservation techniques</i>	<p><i>Minimum 300 volunteer hours contributed to the project per annum</i></p> <p><i>All volunteers to complete training before participating in the monitoring program</i></p> <p><i>Continue to document and update operating procedures to ensure safety of all visitors to Middle Island</i></p>		<p><i>300 in kind volunteer hours were contributed by Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare to the project.</i></p> <p><i>All WCLN volunteers receive training and a briefing before going out to the Island and must sign a volunteer code of conduct.</i></p> <p><i>The Meet the Maremmas tour plan is reviewed and updated annually; it includes safety procedures and a risk assessment. All tour guides are briefed on this.</i></p> <p><i>A full risk review for all aspects of the project is currently being undertaken in conjunction with the WCC risk management team.</i></p>

Project Financial Performance

A budget for the 2016-2017 season was agreed to by the MIPWG and is set out below in Table 2. No sum was set for the WCLN penguin monitoring program on advice that the group intended to raise funds through a crowd funding program (Chuffed) to cover all their anticipated expenses. However, the Chuffed campaign fell well short of the hoped for sum and MIPWG has had to cover their deficit again this year, of \$2,761. This, however, is well short of the preceding year's claim of \$7,847. WCLN are to be congratulated on covering so much of their total expenditure for the penguin project through their own fund raising.

The MIPWG had planned to raise some \$34,500 in income in this financial year. As well, there was a carry forward of \$30,082.41 from last year. Expenses (not including any required to be paid to WCLN) were budgeted to be \$23,975. Real costs of the project are much higher with around \$35,000 in volunteer and WCLN in-kind costs as well as in-kind contributions from WCC staff.

Table 2.1 below provides the financial report. Please note:

- Income from dog tours and donations has exceeded budget
- The "other and contingencies" includes \$850 for the purchase of Avis the puppy. This might need to be reimbursed should the pup prove unsuitable as a guardian dog.

Table 2: Project Financial Performance

MIDDLE ISLAND PROJECT WORKING GROUP BUDGET 2016-17			
And current financials			
	Projected	To date	Difference
INCOME			
Warrnambool City Council Contribution	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	
Dogs tours over summer	\$16,000.00	\$17,880.80	-\$ 1,880.80
Donations	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 8,745.73	\$ 7,745.73
Sale of products	\$ 2,500.00	\$ -	-\$ 2,500.00
WCLN crowd funding*	\$	\$ -	
Other	\$ -	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00
Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Carry forward	\$30,082.41	\$30,082.41	
TOTAL INCOME	\$64,852.41	\$71,852.54	
TOTAL EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARD	\$34,500.00	\$41,770.13	
	Projected	To date	Difference
EXPENSES			
Co-ordination of penguin monitoring (WCLN)	\$	\$ 2,761.00	

Insurance	\$ 375.00	\$ -	\$ -
Consumables	\$ 700.00	\$ -	
WCLN end of year thank you for volunteers	\$ 300.00	\$ -	
Salaries – dog handling and maintenance (WCC)	\$ 15,500.00	\$ 8,928.85	\$ 8,116.15
General Operating Expenses (WCC)	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 9,985.74	\$ 5,985.74
Vet fees	\$ 300.00	\$ 869.63	\$ 1,236.27
Travel, meals	\$ 200.00	\$	
Internet booking fees	\$ 700.00	\$ 134.28	\$ 565.72
Repairs and Maintenance (WCC)	\$ 400.00	\$ -	
Marketing	\$ 500.00	\$ - 850.00	
Other and contingency	\$ 1,000.00	\$ -	\$ 1,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 23,975.00	\$ 23,224.69	
NETT (EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARD)	\$ 10,525.00	\$ 6,857.72	

Table 2.2 below presents a comparison of the MIPWG financial data as of 28 May 2017 compared with the 2015-2016 financial year. It can be seen expenses this financial year are almost half those incurred last year; income has also declined dramatically, chiefly as a reflection of the large income derived from donations accompanying the Oddball movie. The data also show how costs have been substantially reduced compared with last year: in 2015-2016 \$42,869.65 was spent compared with only \$21,800.14 as of the end of May.

Table 2.2: Comparison of Middle Island Financial data from 2015-16 to 2016-17

MIDDLE ISLAND PROJECT WORKING GROUP FINANCIALS 15-16 AND 16-17 And current financials		
INCOME	2016-17	2015-16
Warrnambool City Council contribution	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
Dog Tours over summer	\$17,974.40	\$15,984.00
Donations	\$ 8,745.73	\$35,188.39
Sale of products	\$ -	\$ 2,477.02
Other	\$ 50.00	\$ 4,305.45
Grants	\$ -	\$ -
Carry Forward	\$ 30,082.41	\$ -
TOTAL INCOME	\$71,852.54	\$72,954.86
TOTAL EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARD	\$41,770.13	\$72,954.86

EXPENSES		
Co-ordination of penguin monitoring (WCLN)	\$ 2,761.00	\$ 7,847.00
Insurance	\$ -	\$ -
Consumables	\$ -	\$ -
WCLN end of year thank you for volunteers	\$ -	\$ -
Salaries – dog handling and maintenance (WCC)	\$ 8,624.04	\$22,506.00
General Operating Expenses (WCC)	\$ 9,985.74	\$ 5,896.93
Vet fees	\$ 1,719.63	\$ 189.45
Travel, meals	\$ -	\$ 451.59
Internet booking fees	\$ 134.28	\$ 684.91
Repairs and Maintenance (WCC)	\$ -	\$1,085.28
Marketing	\$ -	\$2,588.37
Other and contingency	\$ -	\$1,622.12
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 23,224.69	\$42,869.65
NETT (EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARD)	\$ 6,857.72	

Media Reporting

After the unprecedented media interest the project attracted in 2015-16, the media interest has dropped in 2016-2017 as indicated in Table four below. Although the enquiries were mainly local there have still been some National and International enquiries as outlined in the full list of enquiries received in Table 5 below. Although significantly lower than last years figures, this decrease was expected after the interest surrounding the movie *Oddball*. It should be noted that the number of enquiries is still the second highest the project has received since beginning to record this data in 2010 indicating there is still a strong appetite for the project after the *Oddball* peak.

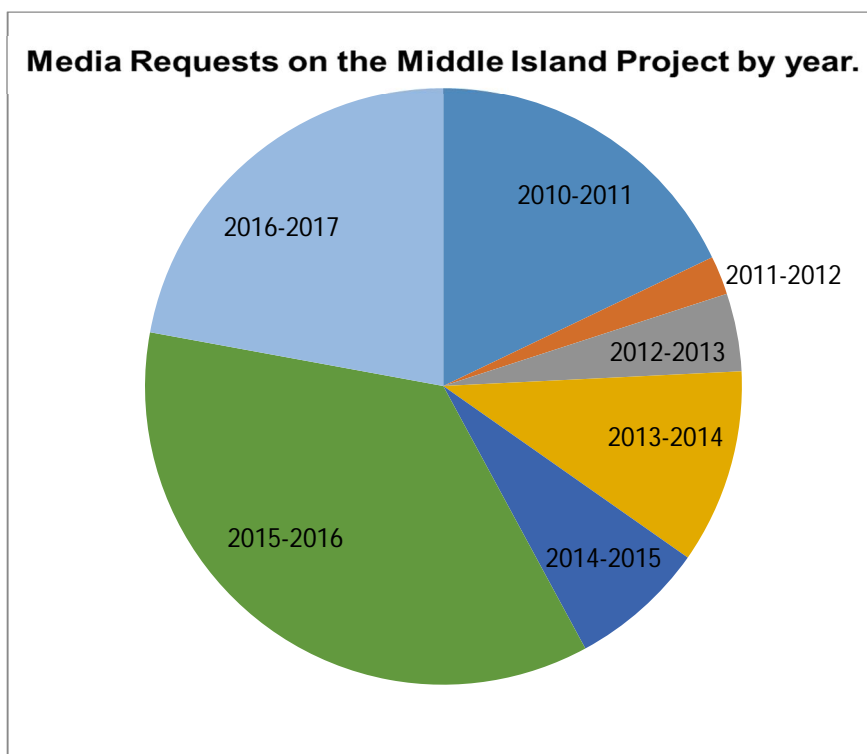


Table 4: Media Requests on the Middle Island Project by year.

In addition to the media attention identified above three other notable events took place that created increased media interest in the project:

- The movie '*Oddball*' was released in China
- '*Oddball and the Penguins*' released for worldwide sale on UK amazon.com
- Oddball passing away in February was reported by a number of media agencies nationally.

Image Seven: Standard newspaper article on the naming of the new pup Avis. (Image courtesy of The Standard Warrnambool's website)



Table 5: Media request associated with the Middle Island Maremma Project.

Media Requests to Middle Island 2016/17			
Date	Company	Country	Type of Media
Jun 2016	Duetsche Welle	USA	Skype interview for an online story
Jun 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on Warrnambool College building the pups a new home
Sep 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on early breeding monitoring checks
Sep 2016	Hachette	Australia/UK	Oddball Book
Sep 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on publication of Peter the Littlest Penguin
Sep 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on the new female puppy
Sep 2016	Win News	Australia	Story on the new female puppy
Oct 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on dogs featuring in Senior Citizens week
Nov 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on the dogs starting work on the island this summer, also mentioned Amor's first night and reinforced that the island is closed to the public.
Nov 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on Naming comp for the new puppy
Dec 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on the shortlisted names for the puppies
Dec 2016	ABC radio Ballarat	Australia	Radio interview
Dec 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on the high penguin count
Dec 2016	Prime 7	Australia	News story on the high penguin count
Dec 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on schools around Vic visiting FSH to meet dogs
Dec 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on the naming of Avis
Dec 2016	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story asking people to stay off Middle Island
Jan 2017	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story asking people to stay off Middle Island
Jan 2017	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story on the dogs barking at FSH and complaints from campers
Feb 2017	White Spark pictures	Australia	Filming for documentary TV series based on "Dogs with Jobs"
Mar 2017	Oddball Movie	China	Oddball has started screening in china
Mar 2017	3YB Radio	Australia	Interview with Denis Napthine
May 2017	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Story titled 'Can you help track little penguins?'
May 2017	The Warrnambool Standard	Australia	Featured in <i>The Camera remembers</i> section.

The project continues to have a strong presence on Social Media with traffic to the www.warrnamboolpenguins.com.au continuing to increase. Between July 1 and March 31, the site recorded 61,712 sessions (up from 40,768 vs the same time last year) with 52,236 unique users (up from 32,271) and 141,310 total page views (up from 111,896). About 100 people visit the site every day. This rose to about 300 people per day around the time of the puppy naming competition and during the summer tourist season.

The site's busiest day was on January 8, where the site saw 5175 sessions following a short video posted on Facebook by "Did You Know – Video" attracted more than 13 million views. This was shared by George Takei (actor from Star Trek) which generated many of these views.

Risk Management

There were no recorded incidents during times of access to Middle Island.

A small number of tours were not permitted to access the Island due to safety concerns arising during inclement weather. In these cases guests still meet the dogs on the beach and were offered the opportunity to attend an alternative tour.

Council employees continue to wear high-vis when on the island and visitors wear life jackets when crossing to the island. This regulation was put into place to strengthen the safety of people crossing to the island.

The Middle Island Project Working Group is currently working with WCC Risk Management team to review all aspects of the project in terms of safety and risk. This review is expected to be completed by the end of 2017.



Image Eight: Maremma Guardian dog on Middle Island

Issues, Incidents and Management Responses

The following incidents have been raised and responded to:

- The number of reported sightings of people trespassing on the island increased dramatically this year. Last season there was one reported incident of unauthorised access to the island by members of the public. This season that number jumped to twenty reported incidents. There is anecdotal evidence that there were a number of incidents of unauthorised access that went unreported. The reason for this spike in unauthorised visits to the island is not known, however tidal conditions provided relatively easy access to the island during the peak summer period.
- There were three incidents of dog biting this year, which is up from one incident last year. Two of the incidents involved a FSH employee and the third a member of the public. This has raised concern and the need to have the dogs personalities professionally assessed has been flagged as a method to determine whether each individual dog is best suited for role they have been allocated and being handled in the recommended way.
- For the first time there were no incidents of the dogs leaving the Island. The preventative measure of removing the dogs from the island when the inclement weather is forecast has been successful.

- One deceased penguin chick was found on the Island in January. Further investigation by Melanie Wells concluded that the cause of death was malnourishment. There was no evidence to suggest the death was due to Maremma interference.
- Over the peak summer period 53 complaints were received by Flagstaff Hill in relation to the dogs barking. Most of these came from people camping in Surfside Holiday Park. In response Amor and Avis, when not on the island, are now kept in the FSH barn overnight and Eudy and Tula are taken to the farm. A complete review of the housing arrangements for the dogs is currently being conducted to ensure that all locations are suitable, have the required infrastructure and meet with all other requirements to house the dogs.
- Over the past two years, since the arrival of Amor and Avis, the training of the new puppies has been of utmost importance. As the dog program does not have the resources to employ a qualified dog handler the majority of the training has been completed by FSH staff. The training that has taken place has been guided by the Guardian Dogs Best Practice Manual and regular contact with Dave Williams the Maremma handler for Melbourne Zoo. The varying personalities of each dog means the success rate of the training has differed. To ensure the long term management of the dogs is consistent and in order to make informed decisions all the dogs will undergo an assessment to determine which dogs are best to the various roles as guardian, ambassador or no role. The assessment will be done by Vic Police dog handlers and Dave Williams. Once both assessments have taken place a succession plan will be prepared.



Image Nine: Surfside Caravan Park with Middle Island in the background.

Lessons Learned

The following lessons have been learned in the 2016-17 breeding season:

- **Penguin Conservation** – Although penguin numbers have risen over the duration of this project careful monitoring of the penguin population, maremma behaviour, canid activity and human impacts continues to be essential. Previously WCLN has contracted Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT) to undertake the monitoring program. Due to the increased costs charged by NGT for this service in the 2016-17 season WCLN contracted Melanie Wells from Wild Reach to coordinate the program.
- **Funding** - The Middle Island Project Working Group continues to explore and deliver business and tourism opportunities for the Project and to build relationships with potential business sponsors.
- **Donations** – The 'Donate Now' on the website still provides a source of income from people who would like to donate to the Project. The figures for this can be seen in the budget figures. In addition to this WCLN run a crowd funding program to raise funds and donations have been received from various groups and schools. As expected the level of donations being donated to the project have dropped significantly since the 'Oddball' hype.
- **Stakeholder Relationships** – The Project relies heavily on good relationships with stakeholders. The Working Group consists of representatives from Warrnambool City Council, Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare and Deakin University. The MIPWG management program helps to guide the Project ensuring it can successfully achieve its aims, ensure adequate resources and that essential information to evaluate the success of the Project is gathered. It is also important in integrating the work carried out by separate organisations into one successful project. Numerous community volunteers contribute to the success of this project. These include those who have agreed to house the Maremma Guardian dogs' off-season, those who monitor the penguin population and the police who provide backup support. The relationship with the community must continue to be nurtured as their in-kind support saves WCC significant time and money. It is important that we continue to engage effectively with all stakeholders and continue to build good relationships through the Project Working Group and other methods.
- **Operational Plan** - The Middle Island Operational Plan is in its second year of use. The aim of the plan is to keep all groups involved in the project coordinated in their contributions to the Project by working from a single guiding document. The use of this document also triggered the risk review which is currently being undertaken.
- **Communications** – Flagstaff Hill continues to be the point of contact for all media enquiries for the project. The amount of media attention surrounding the project is still strong 18 months after the release of *Oddball*.
- **Governance Structure** – The governance structure that was implemented in the 2016/17 season continues to operate successfully. The standing reports added to the agenda for Penguin Update, Maremma Update, Financial Update and Media Update see the committee well informed about the operations of each area.



Image Ten: Little Penguin on Middle Island

Conclusion

After the hype surrounding the release of the Oddball movie in 2015-16 and the resulting media coverage, public interest and extensive donations, the 2016-2017 year have seen operations settle into routine and as such it has been a productive year for the Middle Island Maremma Project. The work began in 2015-2016 in strengthening the structure of the management committee gave way to improved processes which saw much work undertaken and tasks completed in a number of areas.

The conservation of the Little Penguins on the Island remains the group's primary focus and the excellent results achieved in the 2016-2017 season show the colony stabilising while continuing to grow after last year's decrease. This is significant in showing the impact people on the island has on the penguin population and highlights the need for future resources to be used to mitigate the increasing trespassing problem on Middle Island. The decision by the Middle Island Project Working group to no longer contract Nature Glenelg trust to coordinate the penguin counts shows confidence in the expertise of the group and resulted in sound financial decision making.

The work that has begun on reviewing the risk plan and Maremma Guardian Dog succession plan will help prepare the Middle Island Project for a sustainable future. It is envisaged the outcomes from both of these plans will result in a range of improvements for the project in 2017-2018.

Once again there are no reports of fox predation on seabirds while Maremma Guardian dogs have been present on the Island and the continued decline in fox sightings on and around the island this season is further indication of the success of the program.

The Middle Island Project's popularity continues and receives a wide range of interest from the broader community. The public reaction to the news that Oddball had died shows the value of this project to the community and highlights the advantage of engaging the global community in this a unique local project.



Image Eleven: Oddball circa 2006.

