

Kerry Willis

This is a collection of previously published articles about Kerry.

1990 Urban Planning Transport Program Group



Join the Fight Against Global Warming

We can all help create a better world for our children and grandchildren by joining Greenfleet, a unique public initiative for reducing the impact of motor vehicle emissions on the environment.

VicRoads is taking an active role in supporting Greenfleet, an Australian initiative which will be first developed in Victoria.

"Greenfleet enables individual motorists to take responsibility for the greenhouse gases produced by their cars," explains VicRoads' representative on the Greenfleet advisory committee, Major Projects Director Peter Balfe.

"Motorists are invited to take out a \$25 annual subscription to Greenfleet, which will pay for planting and care of seven fast-growing trees.

"Recent studies tell us that, during their lifetime, these seven trees can remove as much CO₂ from the air as the average car produces each year.

"This helps reduce climate problems such as global warming, and provides long term environmental benefits for all of us."

Greenfleet is managed by the Foster Foundation, a non-profit organisation committed to environmental projects. The Foundation is advised by a committee of senior executives from government, business and community organisation such as Landcare Australia, Mobil Oil, the RACV and VicRoads. Its patron is celebrity racing driver Peter Brock, and it is endorsed by Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor John Stocker, who says it's a 'practical and financially defensible solution'.

"VicRoads has taken a subscription for half of its 'red plate' car fleet, and we're encouraging VicRoads staff to take out personal subscriptions and display the Greenfleet sticker on their cars to encourage others to join," said Peter.

"Greenfleet provides a very practical way of combatting greenhouse emissions."

Subscriptions to Greenfleet are tax deductible. For further information or a subscription brochure, contact Caroline Ashton on extn 2174, or you can visit the Greenfleet website at <http://www.greenfleet.com.au>

(L to R) Kerry Willis, Manager, Community and Environment and Peter Balfe, Director Major Projects, attach a Greenfleet sticker to Peter's car.



Good news from our green team



'Planet in race - to disaster' screams the headline on the front page of the Age' - but somehow the news of land degradation, loss of plant and animal species, and water and air pollution seems quickly forgotten. Not at VicRoads, however, where a small team is making big progress in minimising the impacts of infrastructure development on the environment.

The team is Environmental Services, part of the Major Projects division, and a valuable resource for the whole of VicRoads. It is led by Kerry Willis, a former local councillor, teacher and Executive Officer of Victoria's Roadsides Conservation Advisory Committee.

Kerry cut her teeth on road issues in a major battle to preserve tourist roads in the beautiful outer-suburban Melbourne Shire of Sherbrooke. If she exhibited then the expertise, commitment and courtesy combined with steely determination we see today, no wonder her side won!

Not that Kerry and her team are environmental bullies - in fact, quite the reverse. They are all committed to conservation, but they are equally committed to the notion that partnership and persuasion are the best way of achieving outcomes.

"Our task is to lift the profile of environmental issues, and to provide people with the right tools," Kerry explained. "We don't do the job for our customers, but we do provide every possible support to enable them to achieve their environmental management goals."

The VicRoads Environmental Services Team are (l to r): Phil West, Melinda Collinson, Graeme Stone, Praveen Reddy, Manager Kerry Willis and Caroline Ashton (absent). Photo by Geoff Wright.

From guidelines to Greenfleet²

"We develop policy and guidelines on a wide range of environmental issues, and then assist people in applying them to projects," Kerry said. "This includes helping develop briefs for consultants and reviewing consultants' reports."

"One of our major challenges was developing VicRoads overall Environmental Protection Policy, which was adopted in July 1998.

Senior Environmental Officer (Environment Management Systems) Praveen Reddy is currently working on another key document which provides project management guidelines for environment protection.

"My work involves establishing environmental management processes within projects, plus environmental auditing," explained Praveen. He also drew attention to the Environmental and Archeological Incident Reporting System that VicRoads has used for more than 12 months.

"It helps to ensure that significant environmental incidents are reported and assessed so that we can take appropriate action to correct situations and prevent them

Special environmental markers have been installed on the Midland Highway roadside at Huntly, north of Bendigo, to help protect Williamson's Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), a rare shrub. Jim Forge, of Northern Region is pictured inspecting the plant. Photo by Michael McLeod.

recurring," Praveen explained, "and we use the information to keep staff informed about environmental issues and changes in legislation.

"One important thing the system identified was that staff needed some guidance on dealing with contaminated sites and materials, and this has led to the development of a draft guideline for managing these."

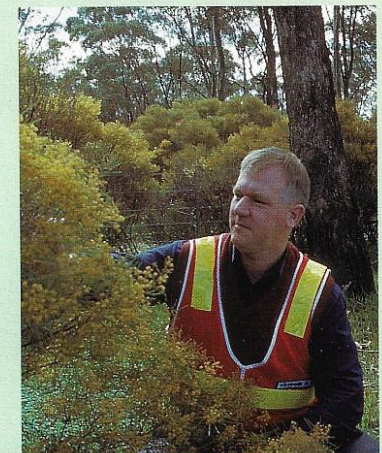
Praveen is also responsible for general issues related to water pollution, working alongside Phil West, who is Senior Environmental Officer (Noise and Air Quality). Phil is an environmental veteran. He came to VicRoads from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) which he joined some 25 years ago.

"I have been doing some air pollution and traffic noise modelling, and help develop briefs when we use consultants to do these jobs," Phil explained. "I'm working with the Eastern Freeway Project on the air quality issues associated with tunnel investigations for the next stage of the Eastern Freeway. As part of that, I'll be exploring the CityLink tunnels to see what's been done there."

"I also handle many telephone calls from the community about noise issues. There's also quite a lot of interest in air quality at the planning investigation stage of projects, but this usually decreases when a road comes in to use."

Protecting flora and fauna

If you need information on protecting flora and fauna, Environmental Officer Melinda Collinson is the one to call. Melinda provides advice and develops policy and guidelines relating to the natural environment, and to archeological and heritage matters.





Mitta Mitta River alongside the Omeo Highway, north of Bruthen, is a site where riverbank protection works were carried out following flooding. VicRoads Highway Construction Engineer Carl Hodgkins (left) and Surveillance Officer John Harris (right) are pictured inspecting the results. Photo by Michael McLeod.

"I also work on social impact assessment for major projects and represent Environmental Services at community liaison meetings," she added.

Graeme Stone is also involved with flora and fauna, in his role of Roadside Management Officer. Graeme, who was initially a surveyor, became interested in roadside management when VicRoads began to sell pieces of land that were originally set aside as road reserves.

"People became really interested in roadsides around 1974 as the result of a public forum on linear reserves," Graeme said. "They realised that as a result of clearing land for urban development and farming, the road reserves were sometimes the last bit of natural vegetation and animal habitat left in an area, so they had to be managed properly."

"I liaise with the environmental officers in the Regions on matters such as managing existing roadside vegetation, controlling weeds and roadside planning. I also have had a long involvement on the State Roadside Conservation Advisory Committee, which involves a number of organisations, and develops guidelines on issues ranging from stock droving to fire prevention to the collection of firewood."

"Within VicRoads we're now concentrating on developing Roadside Management Plans (RMPs) for all major roads in Victoria, which the Regions have undertaken very well."

"Many excellent assessments of roadside vegetation have been completed, and each Region will have its particular achievement which is leading to improved roadside vegetation management."

Wins to remember

Graeme's experience with the RMPs reflects what Environmental Services sees as its most valuable achievement: an increasing awareness of, and commitment to, environmental protection evident across VicRoads.

"In the old days, we usually ended up with us telling them how to do it [environmental protection]," said Phil. "Now, Regions are increasingly taking ownership for environmental issues, conducting their own self-assessments, and then approaching us."

"During planning, staff automatically carry out an environmental assessment, then look at options such as changing an alignment to preserve a significant stand of trees or a cultural site."

"These actions have a snowball effect, because one person takes this approach on to their next project, shares their knowledge and involves others."

Praveen agrees

"Every significant construction project should have a Project Environmental Protection Strategy (PEPS) as part of its quality system and we are seeing some good progress with projects such as the Albury-Wodonga Bypass and Eastern Freeway. Now smaller projects are starting to take this approach, and this is very positive."

Asked to name their favourite environmental projects and achievements across VicRoads, the team ticks off: platypus conservancy (Eastern Freeway); conservation of black gums (Calder Freeway, Black Forest section); the Barking Owl research project (Albury-Wodonga Bypass); GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping of roadside vegetation by Regions and Land Information and Survey; avoidance of the slate mines on the Calder Freeway; and preservation of the Aboriginal scar tree on the Goulburn Valley Highway.

The list is impressive, but Kerry Willis is swift to give due credit.

"We provide advice and support, but it is the people in the Regions and Projects who have enabled VicRoads to achieve these outcomes," she said.

Just call Caroline

Anyone at VicRoads can access the expertise and advice of Kerry and her team – and when they do, the first person they are likely to encounter is Caroline Ashton, whom Kerry describes as the backbone of the department.

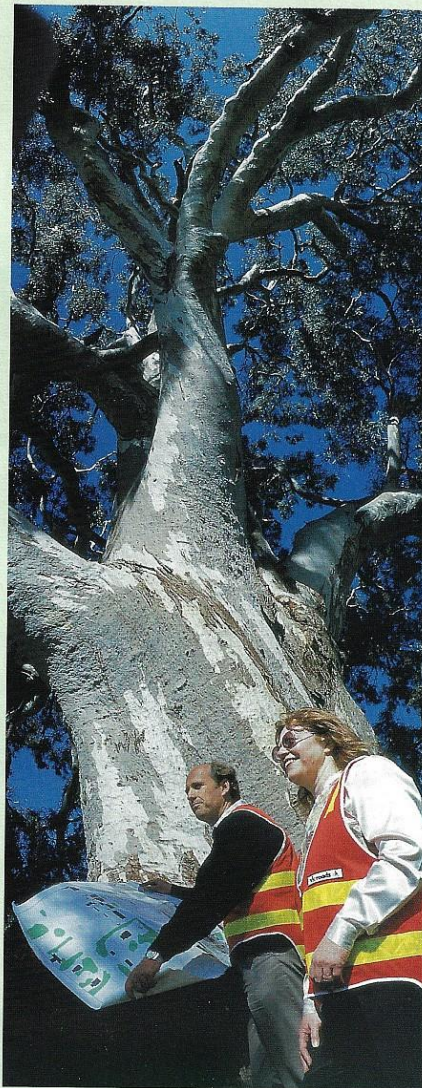
"Caroline manages all our administration, and is responsible for us meeting all OHS and quality responsibilities," said Kerry.

"She's also fantastic at networking, and ferreting out information and contacts."

Environmental Services can provide assistance with accessing legislation, liaising with statutory authorities and advice on what steps to take after an investigation has been completed. The unit also manages VicRoads participation in the Greenfleet program, responds to requests for assistance with inhouse issues such as recycling, and generally promotes environmental awareness throughout the organisation.

"Things just pop up," said Kerry. And no matter how small it may be, she and her team are keen to help.

1. The Age, Wednesday 4 August 1999, page 1.
2. Greenfleet is a project to reduce the impact of motor vehicles on the environment.



A proposed bypass route on the Midland Highway near Guildford was changed, to protect the 'Big Tree', which is known as the finest red gum in Victoria and registered by the National Trust. Pictured with the 'Big Tree' are VicRoads staff members Elizabeth Heathcote (Road Safety & Traffic Analyst) and Alan Stork (Land Management Officer), who were involved in this project. Photo by Michael McLeod.

2023 Lunching with ex-VicRoads people

