

**World Environment Day 5th June 2021
Launch of “Restoring Nature and Communities”**

**Highways and Byways Partnership Program with
North East Bioregional Network,
St. Helens TAS**

PRESENTATION NOTES – BERNADETTE WALLIS MSS

Acknowledgement of Country

Everyone - greetings on this World Environment Day.

Acknowledging Melbourne Apologies: I offer apologies from Melbourne people who were to be here today but for Covid and the Melbourne lock-down. I am from Melbourne but came in before the lockdown. Grateful me!

Stancea Vichie, who is on the Stewardship Council and is the congregational leader of the Missionary Sisters of Service. **David Alcock**, also on the MSS Stewardship Council. Chair of the Board of directors of Highways & Byways, **Marg Casey**, and director on the board, MSS **Bernadette Madden**, who knows Tasmania well from living and working here for many years. Lastly, a huge apology from **Liz McAloon**, the Executive Officer of Highways and Byways. Liz for many months now has been in constant contact, weekly or fortnightly with Todd the president of the **North East Bioregional Network**, initially working on the possible partnership and then with our commitment to be in partnership for the project “**Restoring Nature and Communities**”.

Acknowledging H & B people in the room – joining the dots of Highways & Byways, connection to Tasmania, the Missionary Sisters of Service, how H & B came to be, why in this area of the north-east of Tasmania and how come H & B committing themselves in partnership to the program “Restoring Nature and Communities” at Skyline Tier and within the NE Bioregional Network.

Bernadette Wallis – worked here in St Helens/St Marys fifty years or so ago when no pine forests were here as a Missionary Sister of Service. Remember the warmth and welcome of the people.

Eva Dunn – Present Chair of the H & B Hobart Branch.

Chris Smith – the ex-Chair of the beginnings of H & B eleven years ago, then called John Foundation. Good to have Jill Smith with Chris today.

Mary Williams, Penny Edman, Mary-Anne Johnson, committed members of the Hobart branch. **Frances McShane and Lorraine Groves**, Missionary Sisters of Service and members of the Hobart branch. Sr Lorraine lived and worked among you for eight years in St Marys & St Helens in the Catholic parish and was well known in the local communities. A great love for the people and still has contact with locals after going to Hobart 7 years ago. A number of MSS have worked in the area and knew and loved the warmth and hospitality of the north-east well.

Highways & Byways: Who?

H&B is a charitable organisation, an entity - a company in its own right with a board of directors based in Melbourne - branches in Hobart and Toowoomba. Established by the community of women, the Missionary Sisters of Service in 2010 as their mission arm and legacy into the future. H & B was initially known as the John Wallis Foundation. (Fr John Wallis, as a young Catholic priest in Tasmania, was the founder of the community of sisters in 1944, particularly at the time to focus on disadvantage in the rural, regional and remote areas, initially in Tasmania, then the MSS spread into the eastern states of the mainland.)

Highways & Byways: What's its work?

Highways & Byways has a Small Grants Program and a number of Tasmanian projects in recent years have been funded. This year H & B funded 43 small projects around Australia. After drought, fires, floods, and Covid it seemed to flow that the theme would be : "Healing the Land – Healing Ourselves – Together." These have been small projects up to \$3000. Eg. Dodges Ferry, Community House educating local people in how to manage honey bee hives in their own back yards. In St Helens, the Free2B girls' project which is working so well with young girls in the community. The Bioregional Network has also been funded previously. It is how we have been able to work further with Todd to look to another part of our work that we are now establishing - **Longer Term Programs**.

While "Restoring Nature & Communities" is a pilot program this year with NE Bio-regional network and in partnership financially, H & B hopes to grow and develop, and to expand its partnership with North East Bioregional Network – and we are very proud to be doing this...

It is appropriate that H & B look to areas where there is already a deep connection and relationship, the fact that the Sisters in the past have lived or worked on the northeast of Tassie since the late 1940s. While the Sisters are increasing in age, they wish to leave a legacy they know the area and love the area. Because they travelled the highways and byways, they have known and appreciated the land, the mountains and the sea, the beaches and skies and the beauty of Tasmania. It seems for our time today as we listen to our land, mountains and hills, and seas and waterways in 2021 that this partnership of Highways & Byways with EcoRestoration work is so appropriate.

Highways & Byways Why? Or Why not?

The question could be asked why H & B, our organisation, would be engaged so strongly with Eco-restoration, care for the environment and Planet Earth. It is indeed our common home. For many years the Sisters have had a love for the land, some of them being bushwalkers, photographers of nature and gardeners. They have loved nature. They have seen the importance of eco-spirituality. Five years ago, Pope Francis set out a most important document, *Laudato Si'*, on the Care for Our Common Home. It brought much more awareness and consciousness of the responsibility of stewardship we have as citizens of the world for our environment and our Planet. The devastation and destruction we have witnessed in our lifetime calls us to respond now.....

University of Tasmania:

H & B is delighted that the University of Tasmania will be working with the North East Bioregional Network looking at the benefits of being in nature, both mentally and physically. This is so exciting. It is so valuable that we have such academic research. We will be very interested to see results and it will certainly help to have credibility when securing funding for such work in nature. The work then will be better understood for its benefit for the people, the land and the world. Congratulations!

World Environment Day: What an appropriate day to launch "Restoring Nature and Communities project." World Environment Day has a wonderful website with much information and presenting the challenge ahead of the decade ahead. So I quote: *"There has never been a more urgent need to revive damaged ecosystems than now. Ecosystems support all life on Earth... Many thousands of people across the planet are also gathering to acknowledge World Environment Day and the formal beginning of the UN Decade on Eco-system Restoration."* Todd, you talked about this today, the Decade on Eco-system Restoration. *"We cannot turn back time. But we can grow trees, green our cities, rewild our gardens, change our diets and clean up rivers and coasts. We are the generation that can make peace with nature... This is our moment... To prevent climate catastrophe; to stem the growing tide of pollution and waste, and to halt biodiversity loss. ... This is our moment..."*

On Site

Yesterday, Todd took Frances, Lorraine and myself on-site to Sky-line Tier to see where the work of the project "Restoring Nature & Communities" is taking place. The aftermath of Pine plantations is devastating, but to see the restoring of native trees and plants and to know that many species that were thought to be lost, is so encouraging. The Swift parrot has been sighted in the valley, returning to its former habitat. It gives such confidence that what is presently being done is the right way to go. The hillsides that have been restored after only seven years seem to be alive and thriving. As we walked on the land and talked, I felt refreshed and enlivened.

Tasmanian Eco Nature Resort:

Congratulations to Anton and his restoration work at the Eco Nature Resort in St Helens! His story of working as a global economist and turning his focus to ecology and the gradual transforming of the hotel into an ecofriendly place with its own solar powered energy, its own source of food from land nearby, clearing of blackberries that took 200 truck loads, management at the water's edge with duck ponds, mangroves, etc. is very exciting.

Thank you, Todd, for your presentation today – educating and enthusing us and challenging us in so many ways. You talked of how our restoring of nature work needs to happen in this part of Tasmania, which may be different from other parts of Australia. You mentioned that some parts of the land need to have hot burns, rather than cool burns, to open the seeds left in the soil from before the pine plantation operations began in the 1970s. You explained how the small pines and other weeds that re-grow need to be constantly pulled out so that the native species have the space to thrive. There is no need to re-plant or re-vegetate. The seeds are already there in the soil. And it is so much cheaper to do it this way. To your team, Dan, Scott, Mark and Nathan - thank you for your work. We acknowledge your amazing commitment to ecological restoration.

Thank you Bioregional Network through Todd for the creative and invaluable work being done. And congratulations on the **International Award** you recently received for your important and inspirational work in eco-restoration. We as Highways and Byways – a Community of Service are proud to be in partnership with you this year.

Thank you.