

SWAN AGM 2026: FACILITATORS REPORT

Before I sum up the highlights of this amazing year, I want to acknowledge the passing of two of the women who played a key role in the establishment of SWAN.

Dr. Carole Ford, one of SWAN's founding members died Cairns in January after a long illness. Carole was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2016 for her tireless service to women and the community. Her name is also recorded in 'Emily's List Australia'.

Denise Hassett, who was principal speaker at a meeting of women across our region that led to the formation of SWAN, passed away in June. A feisty advocate for equality and human rights, Denise cared deeply for others and was well loved by all.

We thank them both for their leadership and inspiration.

And now - What an amazing year it's been for SWAN!

There's no way I can do justice to everything that's been achieved, in this brief annual report. So, I've picked out some of the main highlights that reflect SWAN's ongoing commitment to building belonging, enabling women in this southern region to play an active role in community development, and undertaking practical social justice action.

General Meetings

Last year we held five General Meetings and a 30th Anniversary Celebration Lunch, hosting a diverse range of remarkable guest speakers.

Ann Urch gave a very moving presentation about the significant challenges she confronted firstly as a gay man and then as a trans woman.

Kirsty Sword Gusmão AO spoke about '*The Unstoppable Power of Women's Solidarity*'. She shared her personal journey from human rights activist to becoming First Lady of Timor Leste and helping to empower her Timorese sisters.

Mary Crooks AO, former Executive Director of the Victorian Women's Trust, delivered our International Women's Day address entitled: '*Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls: Maintain the Struggle for Women's Safety.*'

Keynote speaker at our anniversary lunch was Victoria's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, **Ro Allen**, with a powerful address entitled '*Participation, Power, and Progress: mobilizing movements to be stronger together with women at the centre.*'

Guest speaker at our NAIDOC meeting was Aunty Gail Kunwarra Dawson who shared the remarkable story of the '*Reawakening Bunurong Language Project*' that is bringing this language, once thought lost, back into everyday use.

30th Anniversary celebrations

A central feature of the year has been SWAN's 30th anniversary. In November, **Monica Coyle** engaged us in a lively workshop where we shared key moments and stories about our SWAN experience to help inform the preparation of a SWAN video.

With support of grants from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and Community Bank Balnarring & District, we undertook a series of activities to commemorate this significant occasion.

A working group comprising founding members **Fran Rule and Judith Graley, and members Susan Blackburn, Rosemarie Draper, Belinda Rodman, Monica Coyle, Ros Beard and myself** have worked tirelessly throughout the year to host our Anniversary Lunch, and produce a series of portraits of SWAN women over time, a new book entitled '*Where SWAN's Soar*' and a documentary video that encapsulates the essence of SWAN and its community development focus.

I'm delighted to say that the portraits, book and a trailer of the video will be unveiled at a Launch event being held on 23 October and that there will be a public screening of the full video during International Women's Day (month) in March.

Other highlights

In the months between our bi-monthly General Meetings, **Moz Lucas** facilitated a series of informal and increasingly popular Coffee Catch ups at very appealing café locations in Mornington, Moorooduc, Tyabb and Sorrento.

The '*Val McKenna Young Women's Advocacy Award*' was presented to two Year 12 students, one from Western Port SC and the other from Rosebud SC. Under the experienced leadership of **Susan Blackburn** and **Lyn Jones** and with generous donations from our members, two more bursaries will be awarded for 2027.

SWAN members have continued to **support First Nations people** and their concerns in various ways, including volunteering and participating in activities at Our Survival Day, and with Willum Warrain, Nairm Marr Djambana and Baluk Arts. Members have also actively supported Treaty, participated in truth-telling and cultural awareness initiatives, and engaged in discussions about how best to support First People to achieve meaningful and lasting justice through constitutional reform.

In November the **SWAN Women for Housing Justice group** facilitated its second Roundtable on Homelessness. This brought together the leaders of over 30 community organisations with local government representatives and Federal

special Envoy for Social Housing and Homelessness, the Hon Josh Burns, to discuss concrete strategies to address the homelessness crisis in our region.

In June, group members met with government ministers and their shadows at Parliament House, Victoria, helping to secure funds for financial counselling, \$2.1M for Assertive Outreach Workers and emergency accommodation assistance.

The **SWAN Women Against Gender-based Violence group** were involved in several community awareness raising initiatives including the '*Stop Violence against Women*' rally in Hastings, as part of the '*UN 16 Days of Activism Campaign*', a theatre performance for senior secondary students about coercive control and initiating a project to urge men to act as allies.

Member interest in setting up other action-oriented working groups has emerged, with concern about racism, and in support of multiculturalism, high on the list.

Committee

In particular, I want to acknowledge the invaluable contribution made by all SWAN Committee members who willingly undertake multiple, sometimes tedious roles, and play an instrumental part in guiding SWAN's future.

Monica Coyle carries out a pivotal role as Communications Secretary and oversees all compliance and administrative aspects of SWAN.

Ros Beard has taken on the Treasurer's role with gusto, making sure our finances stay on track.

Former Speaker Coordinator, **Susan Hillman Stotz** supports the Catering Team and coordinates our raffle to attract much needed income to cover our meeting costs and support the SWAN bursary.

Moz Lucas facilitates our Coffee catchups and skilfully crafts SWAN NEWS keeping us well informed about upcoming meetings, forums and events, both locally and beyond.

Marilyn Hoban has been Committee Minutes Secretary and promotes SWAN meetings in the local media, as well as writing forceful Letters to the Editor about various justice concerns.

Lyn Jones partners with **Susan Blackburn** to coordinate SWAN's bursary, engaging with teachers and Student Award recipients at Rosebud and Western Port SCs.

Mechelle Cheers and **Jill Warner** help guide SWAN's ongoing engagement with First Nations organisations and Committee discussions on how best to support their causes.

Beck Cridland has played an instrumental role in boosting SWAN social media presence with regular posts on Instagram and Facebook. This has greatly increased our outreach.

After several years of service, Marilyn and Beck have decided to relinquish their committee roles to give more time to other pursuits. I know that all their co-committee members will join me in thanking them sincerely for their contribution.

Many other members generously give their time and skills in countless ways. I'll mention just a few in particular.

Erica Churchill provides essential support based on her long-term SWAN experience and leadership.

Melissa Kelly creates attractive flyers for our General Meetings and other events, as well as supporting the preparation of our promotional resources.

Di Lewis provides technical backup with our website and helps to ensure that our newsletter reaches the inbox of over 250 people.

Viv Daniels makes sure we always have an attractive bouquet of flowers to present to our guest speaker.

And we can always rely on long-term members of the Catering Team: **Lynn Carpenter, Helen Corocran and Gillian Adam** to provide refreshments at our meetings.

Looking back, this period has been marked by growth, improved visibility and increased engagement with community partners and government decision makers. And for many of us, once casual connections have become deep friendships based on shared values and convictions.

More coordinated advocacy on priority issues has resulted in greater impact.

As we approach the end of this anniversary year, we can be justifiably proud of SWAN's longevity and the contribution being made to enhance the role of local women in building a more just, equitable and inclusive society.

And so - onward and upward -

As we rise to meet the challenges and opportunities of the next decade!

Diane McDonald, 27 September 2026