WINTER 2026

Saltbush Balnarring Beach Newsletter

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WELCOME TO THE WINTER 2026 SALTBUSH NEWSLETTER

It has been a hive of activity at Saltbush over the last 6 months, with many improvements being made thanks to some generous grants and in kind donations, and the very hard work of many volunteers. You can read more about the capital works and garden projects that have been going on in the rest of the newsletter.

One of the areas we are most excited about is the ongoing regeneration of the land at the back of the property that was previously farmland and placed under covenant as part of the Presentation Sisters' vision, ensuring it will remain a sanctuary for generations to come. Working in partnership with Landcare, South East Water and many volunteers and community groups, the thousands of trees planted last year have needed watering, the guards maintaining and other general tending to. Thanks also to Balnarring Community Bank for their support with this project. Revegetating this wildnerness exemplifies our commitment to caring for people and place, and creating a more hopeful future.

"Thank you for hosting us this morning at Saltbush. The visit left a lasting impression.

Saltbush embodies something increasingly rare: a community setting where mission, living, landscape and stewardship are aligned. The clustered coastal cottages, communal and recreational facilities, immersive natural setting, the care of remnant vegetation, and the scale of the revegetation programme demonstrate a serious commitment to biodiversity restoration and integrated living. A true expression of custodianship. The acknowledgement of the Bunurong/Boon Wurrung people is reflected not only in words, but in the evident respect for land and ecology."

– Mike Day, Co-founder Sharp | Day, envisioning a future where natural and human habitats coexist.

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A message from our C.E.O.

Just over six months into my role as CEO, I continue to feel a deep sense of privilege in serving as custodian of this special place and the enduring mission of the Presentation Sisters. Saltbush Balnarring Beach is a unique meeting point of community, spirituality, and care for people and place, and it has been an honour to learn from its stories, people, and purpose.

These early months have been a time of rich learning and connection. I have been inspired daily by our team and community, deepening my commitment to the vision that guides our work.

We are, however, navigating real challenges. Like many non-profit organisations, we are facing financial pressures in uncertain times, requiring careful stewardship and thoughtful decision-making. These realities call us to remain focused, adaptable, and united in purpose.

With this in mind, we look ahead with both realism and hope—committed to strengthening our foundations, stewarding our resources wisely, and ensuring Saltbush continues to be a place of welcome, reflection, and renewal.

-Keeley Reade, C.E.O.

New path guides guests to the Nano Centre and gardens bloom

We are thrilled with the completion of our new path that now leads directly to the Nano Centre, designed with gentle curves to fit in harmoniously with the natural surroundings and encourage contemplative, gentle walking. Our garden volunteers are busy working to landscape along the edges of the path, planting canopy trees for shade and grasses to soften the edges and help create a peaceful, sensory experience our guests will enjoy. And of course, these beautiful native plants will help support local wildlife and continue our mission to heal and support both people and place. We are incredibly grateful to the Presentation Sisters for their support, and to help bring their long held vision to life.

Meanwhile, our committed team of garden volunteers continue to enhance the grounds with beautiful, healing native gardens. The gardens planted previously are thriving with colourful blooming flowers already attracting birds and insects, and eliciting very positive feedback from our guests. Balnarring Community Bank and local businesses are supporting us to expand these gardens to connect across the entire grounds.

NEW KITCHENS

We are so excited to share that the kitchens in all six of our houses have now been upgraded, with Houses 1 and 6 recently completed. This has been a mammoth project and only made possible thanks to the generous grants from Balnarring Community Bank, a local charity, Benny's Tiles and Red Hill Lions. A special shout-out goes to Paul for the many days of work in assembling and fitting the kitchens, Graham for painting, Dean for carting rubble, the students of St Ives College, Sydney, and all the other volunteers who helped with disassembling, tidying and extra jobs.

CLEANING SHED UPGRADE

Thanks to some impressive fundraising from Kilbreda College and with the help of volunteers, we have been able to upgrade our cleaning shed with new shelves. This has helped us to create a more organised and efficient storage system, and will ensure we continue to deliver the best services for our guests.

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Inaugural fundraiser "A Night of Hope" at Merricks General Store with guest speaker Dr Dietmar Tourbier, Director of Energy at the CSIRO

In June we held our inaugural "Night of Hope" fundraising dinner at Merricks General Store. More than 100 people braved the winter weather to gather in support of Saltbush. The evening raised approximately $15,000, with proceeds going directly towards providing restorative stays for people who need time away from difficult circumstances. The event was a welcome opportunity to share this work with the wider community and to thank the many people who help make it possible. Musicians Anna Davidson and Charles Taliadoros, generously sponsored by the Cope Williams Foundation, created a delightful atmosphere as guests arrived playing their violin and double bass. Guests also took part in a lively auction and silent auction, with a wonderful range of items donated by local businesses and generous individuals. We are very grateful to Warren Joel for his support on the night, and to everyone who donated, bid and helped make the auctions such a success.

A moving part of the evening was hearing from "Tessa", (not her real name), who spoke about her own experience of staying at Saltbush. Her story helped guests understand the difference a stay can make for someone who has been dealing with really stressful circumstances. Tessa explained how after arriving at night in the dark, she and her children woke up at Saltbush in the morning and for the first time felt that life really could be different for them, and she finally felt hopeful for a brighter future. It was a reminder that the work of Saltbush can be truly life changing for families who just need a chance to rest, reflect and reset.

Dr Dietmar Tourbier, director of energy at the CSIRO and a Saltbush board member was the guest speaker for the evening. He gave a fascinating and insightful presentation about Australia's energy transition, encouraging many questions and conversations.

Saltbush is very grateful to the staff of Merricks General Store for hosting the event, to our fundraising volunteers and staff, and to the many local businesses and individuals who supported the auction and silent auction. We also thank everyone who attended and contributed to the success of the evening.

The support shown at our "Night of Hope" will make a real impact. It will help Saltbush continue to provide a safe and welcoming place for guests who need a break, a chance to reset and the opportunity to face life again with renewed hope.

Other Fundraising

We have been incredibly fortunate this year to have had the support of various people and organisations who have helped with our fundraising.

In March we held an International Women's Day aligned walk. We were lucky enough that the rain held off and even though it was a little windy, everyone had a wonderful time, with lunch afterwards in our Nano Centre.

We have also run a regular raffle at the Flinders Hotel, with prizes including a meat tray and other generous donations from local businesses.

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Our Impact

What did you enjoy about your stay at Saltbush?

"The feeling of safety as soon as we arrived. Not having to think about anything but going to the beach. We had so much stress and panic at home so leaving to go to Saltbush was just what we needed to stop and breathe. We would love the opportunity to stay again in the future, the kids haven't stopped talking about their holiday as it's the first one they've had in a very long time and they loved every minute of it."

-Guest feedback 2026

Guest Survey Results

96% Very Satisfied or satisfied with their stay

96% Very likely or likely to recommend Saltbush

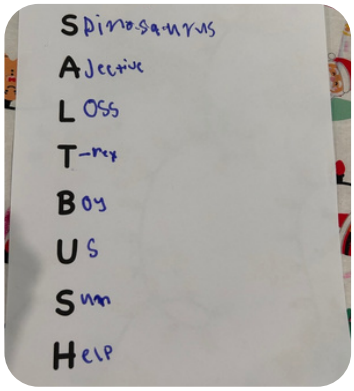
80% Would no get enough respite to manage their circumstances if they didn't visit Saltbush

56% Felt better able to care for themselves after a stay at Saltbush

Our Programs

BASP WATER SAFETY

We recently partnered with Life Saving Victoria and the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP) to provide a fun and informative water safety day for people new to Australia. Statistics show that around 33% of drownings in Australia occur amongst people who have been born overseas, so providing these kind of information sessions can be literally life saving. Add to this the sheer joy of people enjoying the sea for the very fist time, making new friends and playing in the fresh open air, and we had all the ingredients for a very special and impactful day. Thanks especially to Life Saving Victoria for their time, passion and care, to all the volunteers who helped make this happen, and the Phillips Foundation for supporting the program. We finished the day with lunch and a walk through the regenerating bush at the back of the property, connecting with land, sea, nature and community. All the things we care about so much at Saltbush.



SCHOOL HOLIDAY PROGRAMS

Each school holiday we run a variety of activities for children to join in with. It is an opportunity for them to enjoy some slightly more guided play, while the parents who supervise or join in can have a little break from the intensity of full time care, or use the time to connect more deeply with their children in a calm environment where the pressure is taken off them for a while. Every holiday can be a little different, with a range of activities such as art, games, bush walks, creative writing and drama.

At Saltbush we aim to create the chance for children just feel like children again, to be able to play, relax and to express themselves freely. This is the important work of healing that will help them adapt to the challenges they must face without always having to be resilient. Sometimes to play is more than enough.

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Integral Ecology Spiritual Retreat

"Integral ecology is a holistic approach to ecology that emphasises the human and social dimensions of life on Earth. It studies the relationships between living organisms and the ecosystem in which they develop. Integral ecology can be understood broadly as the connection between humans and our environment, and more specifically as an approach to global problems. In "Laudato Si", Pope Francis expands integral human development by adding the ecological dimension. The phrase "everything is connected" is frequently used in Laudato Si', and it is through the notion of integral ecology that Laudato Si' offers an antidote to unsustainable practices." Cynthia Louise Grier, "Ecologiclife."

"I was lucky enough to attend Kildare Ministries Staff Integral Ecology Retreat at Saltbush, Balnarring Beach. This experience was very warming for my soul, I have never felt so grounded. Saltbush offered a very calming and welcoming environment that enabled me to make new connections with staff and be part of our Kildare community." - Jacinta

Saltbush seems the perfect place to gather and reflect on these ideas. As we strive to deepen our work of caring for people and place, we welcome others who are exploring what this means in their own lives too. Recently a group of teachers from Kildare Ministries schools held their "Integral Ecology" Retreat here, led by the inspiring and insightful, Jane Collopy. Along with their workshop sessions, the guests were able to enjoy walking on the land and exploring how it is being regenerated and healing, to spend reflective time in nature, to gaze at the stars, to deepen their own spiritual understanding of what it means for them as humans to connect with place, and to grow their understanding of sacred relationships. Presentation Sister Joan shared with the team the history of Saltbush and some her own wonderful personal stories, while C.E.O. Keeley Reade talked about the more recent developments and how Saltbush is evolving to meet the needs of the future.

If you would like to learn more about holding spiritual retreats or other creative workshops at Saltbush, please get in touch, we would love to discuss your ideas with you.

Acoustic Guitar Weekend

"Meeting so many like-minded people and learning from their experience was incredibly rewarding."
- Guitar weekend guest

We recently hosted an acoustic guitar weekend led by Nick Charles and Geoff Achison. While improving new guitar skills was the primary reason these music lovers gathered together, the benefits of the weekend extended well beyond learning some new chords. The guests enjoyed the time to connect, make new friends, and to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of Saltbush. The aim was to create a weekend where players could learn from outstanding musicians, spend time with like-minded people, and return home with fresh ideas, renewed confidence and a deeper connection to the instrument. The feedback from the weekend confirmed what was already clear in the room: people valued not only the quality of the teaching, but the sense of community that developed around it. We look forward to hosting the next event later in the year.

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Volunteer Spotlight

Anne

Anne has been a regular volunteer at Saltbush for over 2 years, who's smiling face and calm dedication help support our operations team in so many different ways. From folding washing to updating first aid kits, sorting out children's toys and tidying our various sheds, Anne can always be relied upon for a helping hand and a positive attitude. She has been a shining representative of Saltbush at Open Days and been a great support at our PARA refugee and asylum seeker water safety program days. She also helps out the garden team with weeding and other tasks - truly a Jill of all Trades for us!

Anne doesn't only help out at Saltbush, as a committed volunteer Anne also contributes to the Mornington Community Support Centre, Second Bite and Oz Harvest, as well as Disabled Surfers Association Mornington Peninsula. Thanks for all you do Anne, we love having you on our team!

Gratitude Page

We are so very grateful to our circle of sponsors, donors and funding partners who help us to keep the doors open and the lights on, to maintain and improve our facilities and gardens, and ensure a safe, restorative break for our guests.

Thanks to the volunteers and fundraisers from:

- Brigidine College, Indooroopilly
- Brigidine College, St Ives
- Clonard College, Geelong
- Kilbreda College, Mentone
- Kildare College, Holden Hill
- Killester College, Springvale
- Marian College, Ararat
- Marian College, Sunshine West
- St Joseph's College, Echuca,
- Star of the Sea College, Brighton

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