

# Blue Swimmer

Newsletter of the Friends of Gulf St Vincent  
Issue 1 – August 2004

## In this Edition

Welcome to the Blue Swimmer

The Normanville Meeting

Progress on the Gulf St Vincent Marine Plan

The Blue Swimmer Crab (*Portunus pelagicus*):  
why it deserves a place on our flag

Josephine's Journal: recent and upcoming events  
around the Gulf

## Welcome to the Blue Swimmer

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter for the Friends of Gulf St Vincent.

The Friends of Gulf St Vincent (FoGStV) is a newly formed group under the banner of Friends of Parks. We aim to: -

1. Foster a unified community approach to the protection and wise use of Gulf St Vincent.
2. Advocate for the
  - conservation of marine and coastal environments
  - protection of key habitats in the Gulf
  - sustainable use of marine resources
3. Promote awareness of issues relating to the health of Gulf St Vincent.
4. Provide a means of conveying community concerns to government.

We hope this newsletter will serve as both a channel for communication between groups to update others on what is happening around the gulf and as a source of information on various topics and issues affecting the health of the resource we are striving to protect.

As a regular feature we would like to provide our readers with information on what is happening with other groups, what they have been up to and what they hope to achieve as well as present information on an issue of concern. If you have a topic you would like us to raise, article to consider for inclusion or would like to highlight the activities of your group please contact the editorial team and let them know about your ideas.

We are a self-funded organisation and ask a \$5 membership from groups or individuals to help contribute towards administrative costs. If you would like to become a member of FoGStV please contact Nick (8372 6887, Nick.Crouch@tv.tafe.sa.edu.au) or Andrew (littoral@chariot.net.au).

Enjoy.

## The Normanville Meeting

Come along to our Annual General Meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September at the Normanville Surf Lifesaving Club. The meeting will begin with morning tea at 10.30am, prior to presentations beginning at 11am.

Speakers will present topics on ocean ecology, and the Gulf St Vincent Marine Plan. We are also fortunate enough to have a special guest speaker, Paul Cave, presenting the inside story on marina construction.

This will be followed by lunch (at the friendly rate of \$10 per person) at 1pm, with the opportunity to get to know other members of community coastal groups. After lunch there will be a short Annual General Meeting to elect a committee for the next 12 months. Please let us know if you would like to be involved, by emailing Andrew (littoral@chariot.net.au).

The Committee, as it stands currently, is:

Pat Harbison	President
Scoresby Shepherd	Vice President
Andrew Winkler	Secretary
Nick Crouch	Treasurer
Mel Rees	Newsletter Editor
Ian Kirkegaard	Committee Member
Jim Douglas	Committee Member

See you at Normanville for the Friends of Gulf St Vincent AGM.

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## Progress of the Gulf St Vincent Marine Plan

With the near completion of the Spencer Gulf Marine Plan, the state government will shortly begin work on the Marine Planning process for the Gulf St Vincent. The Plan will outline future directions for the Gulf, with the potential to be a significant step forward in preserving its ecology. One of the first important projects for the Friends of Gulf St Vincent will be to ensure this is the case.

For more information, check out the AGM on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, or watch this space.

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## The Blue Swimmer (*Portunus pelagicus*): why it deserves a place on our flag

Written by Ian Kirkegaard

The Friends' logo includes humans and - a crab. *Portunus pelagicus*, the blue swimming crab of Gulf St Vincent.

But the blue swimmer is not ours exclusively. It is found almost continuously around northern

Australia from Cape Leeuwin, across 'the top' and down the east coast to the Victorian border. Beyond that, it is found through the Indo Pacific from the Red Sea to Tahiti. Since humans obligingly dug the Suez Canal, the blue swimmer has swum into the Mediterranean, where it has been abundant along the Levantine coast for about 80 years, venturing occasionally to Sicily.

A very similar species, *Callinectes sapidus*, is found along the Atlantic coast of the USA. That name translates as 'beautiful swimmer that tastes good'. Who says scientific names lack meaning?

*Callinectes* is particularly important to Chesapeake Bay, where it has been caught and savoured by generations of Americans, much as the blue swimmer has in Gulf St Vincent. It carries extra significance now as a symbol of what Americans will lose if they do not stop and then reverse the environmental damage they are inflicting on Chesapeake Bay.

We think the blue swimmer crab can help save Gulf St Vincent from such damage. If we are not careful with this Gulf, and its resources, our blue swimmer will be endangered.

While blue swimmers are almost continuous around northern Australia, the stocks along the southern coast are isolated and vulnerable. Jennifer Chaplin, of Murdoch University, has investigated particular genetic sequences of blue swimmers around Australia. She found that the stocks in the gulfs and bays of South Australia probably are quite separate from other Australian stocks. She suggests extra caution in human exploitation of these stocks, because we do not have the safety net of a supply of recruits from outside these areas if we overfish or otherwise damage the stocks within those areas.

Apart from the obvious danger from overfishing, our blue swimmers may be threatened by rising water temperatures and loss of habitat. The South Australian stocks are also susceptible to an unusual threat - parasitism. Blue swimmers around northern Australia are infected by a parasite called *Sacculina*. It is actually a barnacle, although it looks nothing like common rock barnacles. *Sacculina* invades the body of the blue swimmer, which interferes with its

reproductive organs. Infected crabs are effectively sterile. The only external indication of *Sacculina* is a sac growing under the apron. This is actually a highly productive egg factory. Parasites are particularly good at releasing eggs.

And yet - the South Australian stocks appear to be free of *Sacculina*. So far. We must assume that the local stock would be highly susceptible to *Sacculina*, and to other parasites known from the east coast, just as isolated human settlements were susceptible to the parasites and diseases of early explorers.

If we were to lose the blue swimmer, we humans would lose a species which has given many young South Australians and visitors their first thrill of being able to eat something they have caught themselves. We would lose the opportunity to boil fresh caught crab on a summer evening, and eat them with fresh bread and butter, and a glass of Coopers or some other local product.

But, sad as these losses would be, they would not be the only ones. Blue swimmers almost certainly are essential to the ecosystem of the Gulf St Vincent. We say 'almost' certainly, because the experiment that would prove their ecological value is the experiment we cannot undertake - remove the blue swimmer, and see what happens? We do not think we need to convince anyone that a crab that grows to this size, and is present in such numbers, is essential to this ecosystem.

Each season's recruitment of crabs turns over organic matter on the bottom. A substantial proportion of those crabs become food for other species. Crab larvae, juveniles and adults all provide food for other species. Adults are particularly fancied by snapper.

So we want to remind people that the blue swimmer crab is truly a friend of Gulf St Vincent.

Cultural note: The people who wrote the film series 'Alien' must have been familiar with parasitic barnacles such as *Sacculina*. If you recall the 'infective' stage which clamped itself onto various (disposable!) characters in the films, it was modelled almost exactly on the nauplius phase of a parasitic barnacle. Not sure how it managed to survive out of water, but, I guess, in space they can't hear you being practical.

## Josephine's Journal: recent and upcoming events around the Gulf

The last few months have seen a hub of activity around Gulf St Vincent proving we are not alone in our quest to protect this precious resource, but before we note some of the events happening around the gulf you may be asking yourself why this article is entitled "Josephine's Journal".

In 1802 the English expedition to map Australia's southern coastline, led by Matthew Flinders, met the French expedition doing the same, led by Nicolas Baudin. They met at Encounter Bay, where Baudin acknowledged Flinder's prior discovery and naming of both Spencer Gulf and Gulf St Vincent. The French Government however, at the time being at war with the English, decided to name Australia as Terra Napoleon, and Gulf St Vincent as Golfe Josephine. Until the early 1820's the name Gulf Josephine remained, after which the French reinstated Flinders' place names, since his voyage had preceded Baudin's. The name Gulf St Vincent does give our waters a reverent feel, however should the French have mapped the waters sooner the more feminine and poetic name of Josephine would aptly describe the gulf's beauty and allure.

### Recent events:

Friends of Gulf St Vincent gained some public exposure on World Environment Day with an event at Henley Square. We attracted a number of onlookers with colourful flags displaying our logo.



Photo courtesy of Avante Media.

A workshop discussing shorebird habitats and protection was held at Port Wakefield and provided an opportunity for the community to discuss the importance of intertidal areas for shorebirds. For those interested in the topic a similar day is planned for October which will be more focused on how we can put the conservation theory into practice (see calendar below).

A coastal community workshop was held recently which mostly covered the metropolitan parts of the gulf. The workshop provided an opportunity for volunteers to share information and network. Watch this space as more workshops are in the pipeline for other parts of the SA coastline.

For more information about Friends of Gulf St Vincent please contact: Ian (ianrk@iprimus.com.au). To add your event or workday to Josephine's Journal, contribute an article or snippets of information contact the editors: Mel (0418 802 816, melanie-rees@lycos.com) or Nick (8372 6887, Nick.Crouch@tv.tafe.sa.edu.au).

If you are receiving this by the post and would prefer an electronic copy please email your contact details to Nick (Nick.Crouch@tv.tafe.sa.edu.au) and help us save paper.

### Future events:

When	What	Further Details
<b>September</b>		
6 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup>	Funding for coastal (& other) on-ground works in NYAD region (including north of Pt Gawler and YP)	Mel Rees (08) 8664 1408, rees.melanie2@saugov.sa.gov.au
5 <sup>th</sup>	Friends of Patawalonga Creek workday	Andrew Winkler (littoral@chariot.net.au) <a href="http://users.chariot.net.au/~littoral/pat-ck/fopc/">http://users.chariot.net.au/~littoral/pat-ck/fopc/</a>
<b>19<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Friends of Gulf St Vincent AGM – Normanville</b>	<b>Ian Kirkegaard</b> (ianrk@iprimus.com.au) <a href="http://users.chariot.net.au/~littoral/fogsv/index.htm">http://users.chariot.net.au/~littoral/fogsv/index.htm</a>
<b>October</b>		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Friends of Pat Creek workday	Andrew Winkler (littoral@chariot.net.au) <a href="http://users.chariot.net.au/~littoral/pat-ck/fopc/">http://users.chariot.net.au/~littoral/pat-ck/fopc/</a>
10 <sup>th</sup>	Sharing the samphire coast workshop - Port Wakefield	<a href="http://www.wwf.org.au">www.wwf.org.au</a> Anne Jensen (ajensen@chariot.net.au)
19 <sup>th</sup> – 25 <sup>th</sup>	National Water Week	<a href="http://www.savewater.com.au/waterweek/">http://www.savewater.com.au/waterweek/</a>

**Friends  
of Gulf St Vincent**

