

Float Almanac 2017 – 2018

Helen Sheil (October 2020)

Tracking the changes

It is the time for poets and prophets and speaking of our love for one another publicly, personally, politically, regularly, gratuitously, dangerously – to our neighbours, our workers, our estranged friends, our family members, the ones who voted with us and the ones who voted against us, who perhaps are just as terrified as we are and that's how we arrived at this moment.

(lfe 2019:65 New Community Vol. 17 (2) 66 -2019)

FLOAT Almanac (*almanak*)

As the *FLOAT* vessel was in planning and construction a collaboration formed with a broader community of residents to research and document the seasonal changes of Lake Tyers and create a *FLOAT ALMANAC* – to commemorate the changing cycles of the area which may inspire, and be a reference for, future residents and visitors. www.float3909.



Interested people began to meet weekly at the Waterwheel Tavern to share thoughts, observations and showcase their endeavours. Tavern Tuesday as it became known has no membership, or

attendance records and the group numbers swell or dwindle according to family, travel and work commitments. Numbers range from a dozen to 60 or more on a weekly basis that continued for 3 years. All are welcome and valued in this facilitated discussion, their presence affirmed and valued. The foundation is small group democracy drawn from the protocol of study circles (Larsson & Nordvall 2010) where all at the table are valued for their life experience and listened to respectfully.

Community of place

Country is - a nourishing terrain that gives and receives life. A fundamental proposition in Indigenous law and society is that a country and its living things take care of each other.

(Rose 1997: 3-4).

The community reference is geographic. In European frameworks a catchment or bio-region and in Indigenous knowledge 'country' that is *multi-dimensional – [it] consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals, surface water and air. There is sea country and land country, in some areas people talk about sky country. Country has origins and a future, it exists both in and through time (Rose op.cit).*

Using an adaption of the Country Fire Authority graphic indicator people were invited to share their view of the current situation across Jim Ife's six aspects of a balanced community life: social, cultural, political, economic, personal and spiritual and the environment (Ife 1995) at the beginning of the project, during and 12 months later.

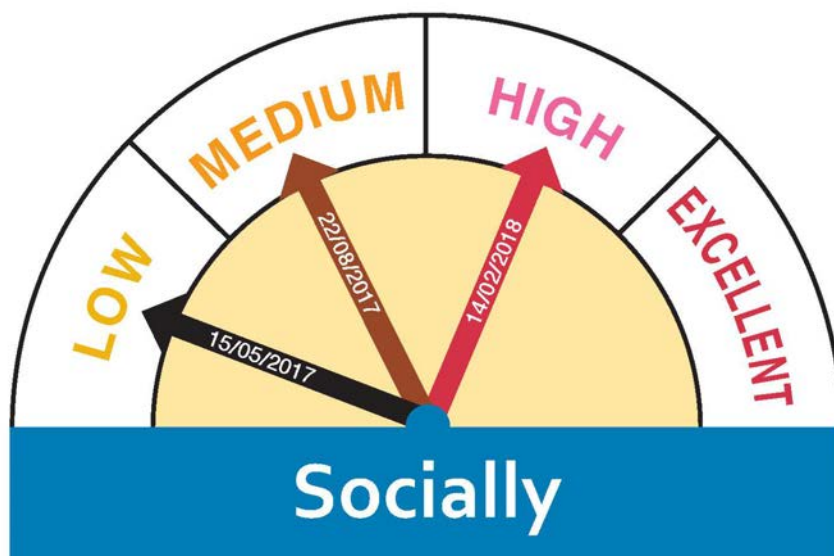
Summary

FLOAT began during the 3 years of drought but prior to devastating fires and COVID19. Socially, culturally, environmentally, personally and spiritually people indicated positive development that created a groundswell of trust and involvement with people across a broad spectrum who shared a common love of the lake. Environmentally there was energy and greater involvement that erupted into increased distress when natural and built environment was damaged due to policies, vandalism or ignorance. Politically people remained frustrated, despite years of working to engage constructively. This connection between people has continued to nurture personal and community ventures that invest in and celebrate local art, a healthy catchment a vibrant culture leading to employment that benefits from this foundation. The mix is appealing in this time of environmental and health crises as a process to listen to and tackle complex situations has been established.

State of Community Indicators used to reflect on impact of FLOAT: the arts + science + environment floating art studio on Bung Yarnda (Lake Tyers).

Socially

Social involvement is the interaction within communities. How would you rate your ability to have positive opportunities for involvement, the energy, time and resources to participate productively?



Increase in social activity. At the beginning of FLOAT individuals had an interest in the lake but lacked a way to know each other or work together. The weekly gatherings at Tavern Tuesday and involvement in the Almanac invited people to share observations on changes in the landscape and community life from their perspective. Connections and friendships blossomed as more and more people were welcomed at the gathering and were listened to. Some husbands came tentatively with a wife who painted then mentioned that they wrote 'some poetry' or 'painted fish' or 'etched on glass' and began to share their work with the group.

For example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pBlmEAV31I Doug Esler

https://www.instagram.com/bill_payne55/?hl=en Bill Payne

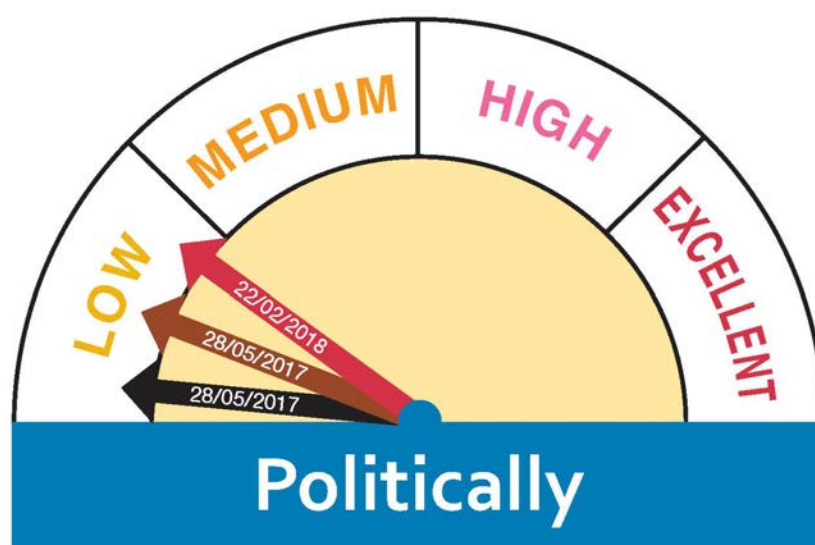
The ripple effect of the group becoming more vibrant with each personal success led to strong friendships and trust between participants.

1. **Float almanac** 15/05/2017. **Low** *Work outside of community in Bairnsdale on 3 days of week. Carer of young children, so much of social involvement is around the children's activities.*
22/08/2017 **High** *An overall increase in social interaction. FLOAT has been so enjoyable to attend each week, and also additional activities. More involved in school volunteering, as I have left work to retire.*
2018. **Excellent** *I feel connected to my community and am willing to get involved with community groups. FLOAT has been welcoming and instrumental in encouraging wider/inter*

group participation. I have a strong connection with school and sporting club and realise the more involved the better I feel about myself and the community. As a career of younger children it is important to encourage and model importance of community to them. Karen Murdoch.

Politically

How would you rate your current political involvement? That is your ability to participate in decisions that impact on your life at all levels: community/local/regionally/state/national or international levels.



A distrust of politicians, political systems and their capacity to act in the public good was a consistent response that resonated with scenario's familiar to many coastal communities. In the absence of any planning scheme to regulate development, short term greed introduced clearing, animals and over population of sensitive eco systems (Raynor 1997:11).

Support came for short term projects such as community groups 'cleaning up' rubbish, weeds, care for bird and marsupial breeding sites and monitoring health of the lake. For those seeking to care for a relatively undamaged catchment this is a distressing and frustrating state of affairs where everyone loses as inappropriate development impact on the lake that in turn impacts on recreational activities, fishing, accommodation and habitat and distress to local Aboriginal communities.

Bigger has not been better for East Gippsland Shire with its average of 2 people per sq. mile. A few regional centres and small scattered coastal and hinterland communities do not fit the 'level playing field' modelling of centralised competitive tendering policies legislated into all layer of government. The local government's capacity or will to act democratically in the interests of citizens has become increasingly problematic. The once resource rich East Gippsland shire has increasingly become an area of distress as few natural resources are owned locally and the majority by overseas interests and local government and institutions are permeated by language of customers rather than citizens. From a community perspective there is little long term engagement with decision-makers.

Float Almanacer

(29/05/17) **Medium:** I find that politicians in general are pushing their own agenda which in most cases is to the detriment of the community.

29/8/2017. **Medium.** I am questioning more and more about our democracies. What's happening to it? Politics is overwhelming at times – sifting through the bullshit to get to the truth.

14/02/2018 **High** Being in FLOAT has enabled me to hear and understand political issues, particularly those impacting the environment. However, there is a strong voice in the group who all want environmental change for the better and are prepared to be politically active particularly in areas of mining and protecting our precious landscape.

Concerns were expressed in relation to local government pandering to developers and business at the expense of constituents.

'Rampant rorting and flaunting of building codes', National government – shame over refugee treatment, and lack of leadership on racism'.

Low Single blocks are now being sub divided.

Fire versus forest.

Loss of vegetation, habitat for birds, lyrebirds at Lake Tyers Beach, Echidna – small marsupials.

"Ownership of commons" where I live. Gardens encroaching, invasive plants thrown over the bank and take off. Throwing garden waste over is common practice it kills vegetation and 'improves' the view.

No action taken by council despite letters, phone calls, notifications to councillors and bureaucrats.

Worked with others to no avail.

Over fishing.

Cats and dogs at Lake Tyers Beach!!

Low Politics do matter to me, but I get very disillusioned at the dishonesty and greed: economics being their major focus.

Medium Float engaging constructively across all these issues but not well supported within region.

Economically

How would you rate the current state of economic activity in your community? Including levels of employment, circulation of money/goods locally and rate of reinvestment or depletion that impacts on your life. Do you observe a balance between current resources in the area and options for the long term?



Economic activity increased

Weekly FLOAT gatherings at the Water Wheel Tavern of 20 to 50 people many of whom stay for lunch is a benefit to a seasonal business. Visiting artists stay in local accommodation, tell others of the beauty and vibrancy of the area. The demand for real estate is competitive. The Lake Tyers Hall committee, FLOAT and *Stories of Influence* support each other with time, skills, raffles, attendance, ticket sales and art auctions. Gippsland Solar committed solar unit to FLOAT vessel for reduced amount and Art Auction at the Tavern made up the required amount (\$7,000).

Artists in Residence, Lichen Kelp from 'Seaweed preservation society' inspired a grand feast at Tavern in partnership with Sailor's Grave Brewery featuring seaweed beer, Seasalt Bakery featuring seaweed bread and each dish on the menu featured seaweed. Sold out event.

Hobbies turned into art forms and businesses as individuals become more confident in their abilities to the delight of the group. Fashion shows of textile artists on the FLOAT feature designs inspired by the lake now have independent web pages: *Floating threads* <https://www.floatingthreads.com.au/> and *Frocksmith* <http://www.frocksmith.com.au/>.

Float almanac

15/5/2017 **Low** Community in Lake Tyers Beach and Lakes Entrance have little money to spend on more than basics. Business seems to be struggling and closing down –which effects employment options/tourism etc.

22/08/17 **Low** Economic issues are all consuming, a priority it seems to all government decisions. Something I do not agree with or like.

Feb. 2018. **Medium** Within the area a number of businesses are closing in the shopping centre. Times are changing and the internet is an option for people to make purchases now. Within the community, I do not hear 'doom and gloom' stories. The community is buoyant and appears positive in regard to economic development. FLOAT has demonstrated other economic options that value the environment. A different view of how the economy should work.

Float almanacers

29/05/2017 **Medium** I belong to a socio-economic groups that is becoming increasingly marginalised.

29/08/2017 **Medium:** I'm becoming more aware of the struggle for regional communities in terms of budget allocations.

14/02/2018 **High** The FLOAT project has been extremely positive and hopefully has opened the eyes of those who 'control the purse strings'! FLOAT on a SHOESTRING was a successful venture and hopefully will advance to bigger and better community involvement and job prospects.

Personally and spiritually

How would you rate your ability to 'have a life' that has personal expressions of creativity and spirituality? To what extent are their opportunities to reflect on what guides your daily journey, your inter-action with others and your sense of place in the world?



Float celebrated personal creativity, aware that each of us contributed to the confidence and motivation for others to take another public step.

Ripples

*Our creations, show the fragile beauty of the world.
Words, invite connection.
Our worlds expand as we walk, talk, paddle and listen together,
Observing and interpreting
Beeing in this natural gallery (Sheil 2018)*

Float almanacers

'I have pulled my finger out and taken my photography seriously and learnt to smile a lot.'

Like minded people, so I don't have to explain the films, books, music etc. that I mention. There is usually someone from the group whose eyes will light up. Unlike before where people I mixed with had the glassed over look.

FLOAT is bringing a new look to cultural development in the area. NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL approach. More all welcome bring what you are.

02/06/2017 **Low** Being a visual artist I find great fulfilment and enrichment on many levels.

2/10/2017 I feel happy with this creativity sustains me, my spirituality nurtures me through the natural world.

Presentation by Sylke Fromberg from Germany on *The European Celts and their relationship to nature* packed the Tavern, workshop at Fisherman's landing and Lake Tyers Beach Hall.

Med to high (18/01/2017) Sense of peace very comfortable

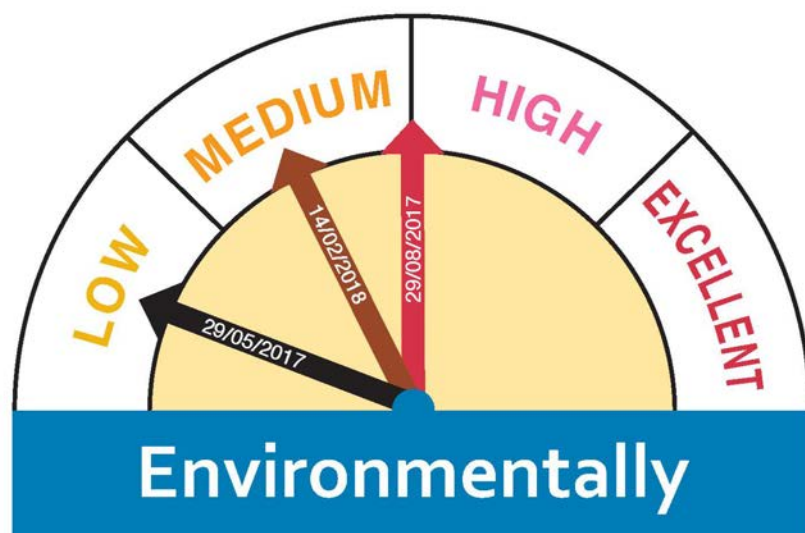
12/09/2017 **High** FLOAT has brought me a whole new sense of self and belonging.

Excellent 5/12/17 Being involved in the FLOAT ALAMANC group has increased my confidence in my opinions, my ideas and my direction in life. While m sense of place in the world is not perfect, the past year has supported my growth towards finding a solid ground for my soul.

28/02/2018 **Med to High**. The project, through the personal interests and studies of others opened up environmental stewardship.

Environmentally

How would you rate the current state of policy and planning in regard to environmental issues impacting on your community? Are processes open and accessible? Is there an ability to share knowledge and be involved in decisions and actions for care of the environment?



Environmental development increasing

Respected environmental elders in the community who had a long history of active involvement in planting and protection of the catchment came along to FLOAT hopeful but not optimistic.

Over time they began to relax and smile as families with young children came to Coast Action weeding and planting days. FLOAT welcomed discussion on impact of deer on habitat, the geological

evolvment of the estuary and its relationship to Gippsland Lakes along with Indigenous storytellers who shared stories of estuary management, introducing us to old language insight. Environmental beauty featured in the myriad of creative arts and literature. They are now more hopeful without being ignorant of the limitation of current coastal planning legislation

Float almanacers

High Always had a political interest. Awareness of impact of political policy on individuals. Less politically active now than in the past. Policy inertia is discouraging. (Phil E)

High to excellent. I know how to engage but often don't. I just rage at the MACHINE. (Frank Flynn)

29/05/2017 **High** This is why I moved here! I love the environment, history, people, cultures and opportunities.

29/08/2017 **High** There is a fairly broad platform to share and gather knowledge providing one takes time to investigate.

14/02/2018 **High** I have listened to many discussions about the environment, been on some beautiful walks and experienced nature as it should be – left alone to exist in a clean and safe environment. I have seen beautiful images, witnessed the change of seasons and the most exciting thing from all of this is the move to make Lake Tyers Heritage Listed. This would never have happened had it not been for FLOAT and to me it is the 'icing on the cake'. An environmental legacy for future generations to respect, care for and enjoy.

02/06/2017 Low There seems to be an awareness generally of our environment and its impact on decisions protection and repair, how to find information and pertinent bodies to approach. Landcare is an exception. 4/10/17). Policy and planning often seem to drown in a quagmire of bureaucracy and incompetence.

6/7/2017. **Excellent** Almanac people were involved in recent rainforest working bee.

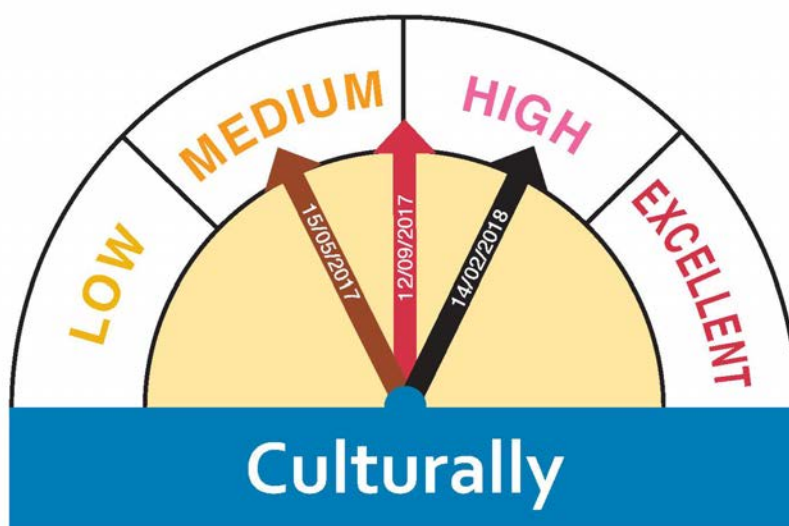
5/12/17 Med to High Care, respect and protection of our environment is important to me. Being involved in the ALMANAC PROJECT has improved my local knowledge and given me stimulation to become involved in looking out for opportunities to support decisions which support our environment.

Feb 2018 **Medium** Policy and planning in regard to our environment has been absent. The pristine environment is not recognised as the valuable asset it is by government departments. Threats are always around the corner as unsuitable planning and projects are considered, without thought of long term affect to community and environment. FLOAT supports the appreciation of the environment through experiences and art, knowledge and understanding. FLOAT has connected various groups to work together, communicate with each other and support each other: re environment.

In light of the above frustrations FLOAT has an exciting potential to impart new life and vigour into the community life of Lake Tyers Beach. Art in all its thoughtful forms has an uncanny capacity to foster creativity and kindle the imagination. In short – it defines and expresses what it is to be human.

Culturally

How would you rate the state of cultural activities in the community? The private or public celebrations of creative life in song, dance, festivals, art, artisans, food and recreation? How would you rate the balance between local ownership and realistic resourcing in all its dimensions?



Cultural capital increasing.

Jochen Kruse: artist and calligrapher came to Tavern Tuesday regularly. He is quiet deaf and spent the time observing and drawing folk at the table, delighting people with page by page emergence of his universal children's story *When Gargoyle saw Schiltzor* (schiltzohr – german for wallaby with slit in its ear from tangling with wire as it broke into his garden hungry for food during the drought of 2017. The pair go on adventures that include the Notre Dame Cathedral fire – an international almanac.

[When Gargoyle saw Schlitzohr - book by Jochen Kruse - foundry](#)

www.ifoundthefoundry.com › shop

Float almanacer

(Beginning) **Medium** Long been a bit of a loner, travel my own path. Gradually coming out of my shell after a life of introspection and insular pursuits. (poems shared publically).

[www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) › watch "On Being An Almanacker" by Phil Evans – YouTube

<https://ruralcommunities.com.au/on-being-an-almanacker/>

15/05/2017 **Medium** Culturally there are various opportunities in the areas around Lake Tyers to get involved in creative events.

Feb 2018 **High** FLOAT has opened up so many opportunities to celebrate /experience cultural activities. It has brought art to the forefront. Indigenous culture was evident (showcased) by the corroboree and the whole community were inspired and emotionally affected by what they saw/felt. FLOAT encourages cultural development in all its facets and personally I am enjoying the journey.

18/01/2017 **Medium** Quite low as I am still 'new' to the area and settling in, finding the opportunities and getting involved in what's going on locally.

12/09/2017 **Medium to high** FLOAT is bringing a new look to cultural development in the area. NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL approach, MORE ALL WELCOME BRING WHAT YOU ARE

5/12/17 **Med to High** There is more starting to happen but in a slowly building way which in the long run feels like it will be sustainable in the future.

29/05/2017 **High** I am enjoying the opportunities to explore different cultural avenues.

29/08/2017 **Medium to High**. I have found that there is plenty of cultural activities in the community and opportunity to develop further if needed.

14/02/2018 The exhibition demonstrated individual creative abilities coming together in a fantastic community setting. Overall it was empowering and I've learnt a lot about cultural processes, development of relationships and issues attached to these processes. Being able to advance myself creatively within a community arts project has been a fabulous experience and one that will stay with me. I am sure others will be inspired to continue their creative endeavours as I intend to do. It has made me realise that there is a purpose to art in more ways than one. I would never have had the opportunity to develop relationships in the community had it not been for my creative choices and achievements.

Balanced development

It is change at all these levels that is the desired outcome of transformational learning. A shift in understanding and practice reinforced with reflection. New stories are shared, not of frustration, division and isolation but of connection, optimism, action and involvement, located in the landscape. Not static but regenerative and democratic.

I invite others to use these indicators – not to find commonality but to appreciate the richness of diversity and connection. To give visibility to the invisible.

Dr. Helen Sheil

<https://www.ruralcommunities.com.au>