**The birth of Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests**

The time was right, in 1998, for a number of Castlemaine locals to form a group working for better protection of the surrounding Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands.

The ravages of 19th century gold mining and timber harvesting had seriously wounded these remarkable, ancient woodlands.

Over 80% of Box-Ironbark forests were gone. But many of the remaining fragments of the once vast sweep of these forests, though crippled, had been slowly recovering, partly because they had been left to their own devices. However pest plant and animal invasions were growing, demands for firewood and other resources continued, the human population was expanding, and many woodland species were seriously threatened. It was time to martial some real help.

In April of 1996, the Victorian Government had asked the then Land Conservation Council, its independent public land management advisory agency, to make recommendations on the future of central Victoria’s struggling woodlands. An important part of the Council’s process involved hearing from local people, as well as assembling the best scientific advice.

The future of the forests became a common talking point around town, most prominently in a modest but popular café at the time: the Screaming Carrot. But it was a contentious issue, and it wasn’t clear how best to mobilise effective support for nature conservation.

The then President of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists, the late Ern Perkins, had a solution. He invited a group of key protagonists to his home for a cup of tea, and outlined a proposition for the formation of a new nature conservation group. At that meeting, the seed for the formation of the Friends of Box-Ironbark Forests, Mount Alexander Region (FOBIF) was sown, and that seed was carefully nurtured into fruition.

The inaugural public meeting of FOBIF took place soon after that in the Castlemaine RSL building.