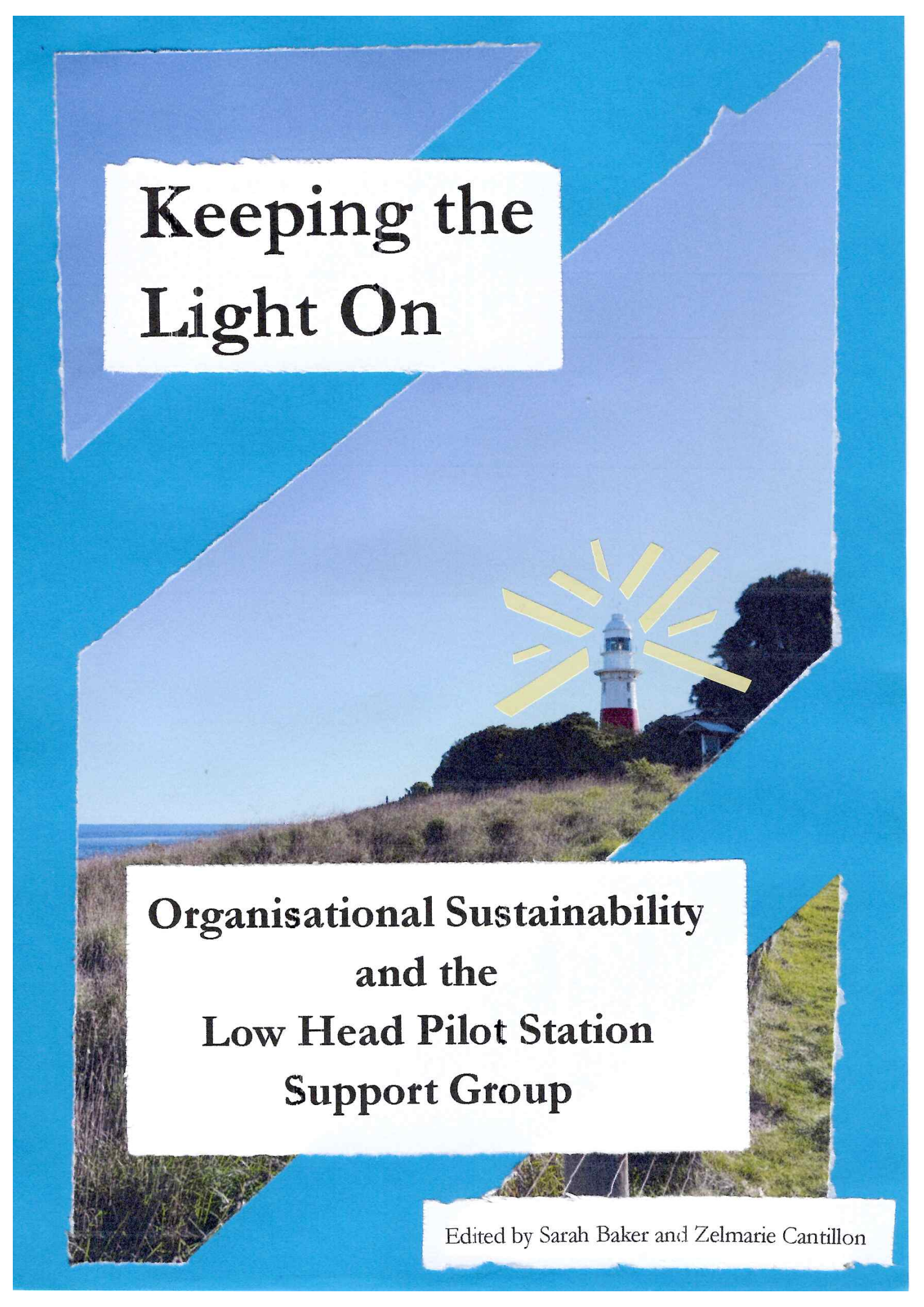




Keeping the Light On

Organisational Sustainability and the Low Head Pilot Station Support Group

Edited by Sarah Baker and Zelmarie Cantillon

Sustaining Community Heritage zine series

Series editors

Professor Sarah Baker

Dr Zelmarie Cantillon

The Sustaining Community Heritage zine series emerges from an Australian Research Council-funded project, 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector'. This project explores the organisational sustainability of Australia's volunteer-managed galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies which serve important functions in shaping public history through the collection, preservation and display of local, everyday and marginalised heritages. However, the sector faces a sustainability crisis. Mounting pressures pose a threat to the long-term futures of volunteer-run heritage institutions, putting at risk the diversity and accessibility of the nation's historical record. In this project, we collaborate with representatives from community heritage institutions across Australia to co-develop strategies for recognising value, measuring organisational sustainability and creating benchmarks for sustainable practice.

The zines in this series capture the work of the project as it unfolds, enabling volunteers in community heritage organisations to communicate their experiences and knowledge creatively and accessibly. We approach the zines as a way to facilitate a networked, co-designed understanding of organisational sustainability from a range of institutional contexts. The zines in the series identify challenges, but they also seek to build on existing resources, capabilities and ambitions already in place for the pursuit of viable futures.

For project updates and other issues of this zine series, see:
<https://communityheritagetookit.com/>

Keeping the Light On: Organisational Sustainability and the Low Head Pilot Station Support Group

Editors

Sarah Baker
Zelmarie Cantillon

Contributors

Anne Batt
Jill Holland
Des Wootton
Lorraine Wootton



Published by Community Heritage Press



Copyright information

Creative Commons Attribution + Noncommercial + ShareAlike
(CC BY-NC-SA)

Contributors hold the copyright to their submitted piece(s) and can republish their contribution(s) without seeking permission from the zine editors. Contributors can also distribute the work in the zine format as they see fit. This zine's Creative Commons copyright license lets other entities remix, adapt, and build upon Contributors' pieces non-commercially, as long as they credit the Contributor and license their new creations under identical terms.

Ethics

This project has received full ethical clearance from Griffith University's Human Ethics Committee (GU ref no: 2025/199).

Funding information

This publication is funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector' (DP250101408).

Year of publication: 2026
ISBN: 978-1-7644213-5-5



Contents

Editorial

- Sarah Baker & Zelmarie Cantillon.....vii

The road to Chairman

- Des Wootton.....1

Sustainability connections 1

- Des Wootton.....2

The challenge of volunteer numbers

- Des Wootton & Sarah Baker.....3

Go, go, go!

- Des Wootton.....5

Sustainability connections 2

- Jill Holland.....6

Near term priorities for maintaining organisational sustainability

- Des Wootton & Sarah Baker.....7

Looking back – hurdles

- Jill Holland, Des Wootton & Lorraine Wootton.....8

The light is on off the beaten track

- Jill Holland & Des Wootton.....9

Looking back – enablers

- Jill Holland, Des Wootton & Lorraine Wootton.....10

Advice for establishing a long-lasting community heritage organisation

- Des Wootton.....11

Looking ahead – hazards	
- Jill Holland, Des Wootton & Lorraine Wootton.....	12
Closure scenario	
- Jill Holland, Des Wootton, Lorraine Wootton & Sarah Baker.....	13
Looking ahead – opportunities	
- Anne Batt & Jill Holland.....	14
Our monstrous library and archives	
- Des Wootton.....	15
Sustainability connections 3	
- Lorraine Wootton.....	18
Resilience scale	
- Des Wootton & Sarah Baker.....	19
Succession reflections	
- Lorraine Wootton.....	21
How to afford a paid position?	
- Des Wootton.....	22
What I find rewarding about being part of the Support Group	
- Jill Holland.....	23
Acknowledgements.....	24

Keeping the Light On: Organisational Sustainability and the Low Head Pilot Station Support Group

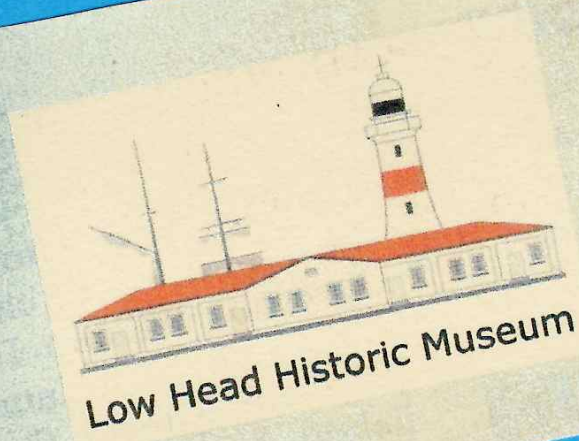


Editorial

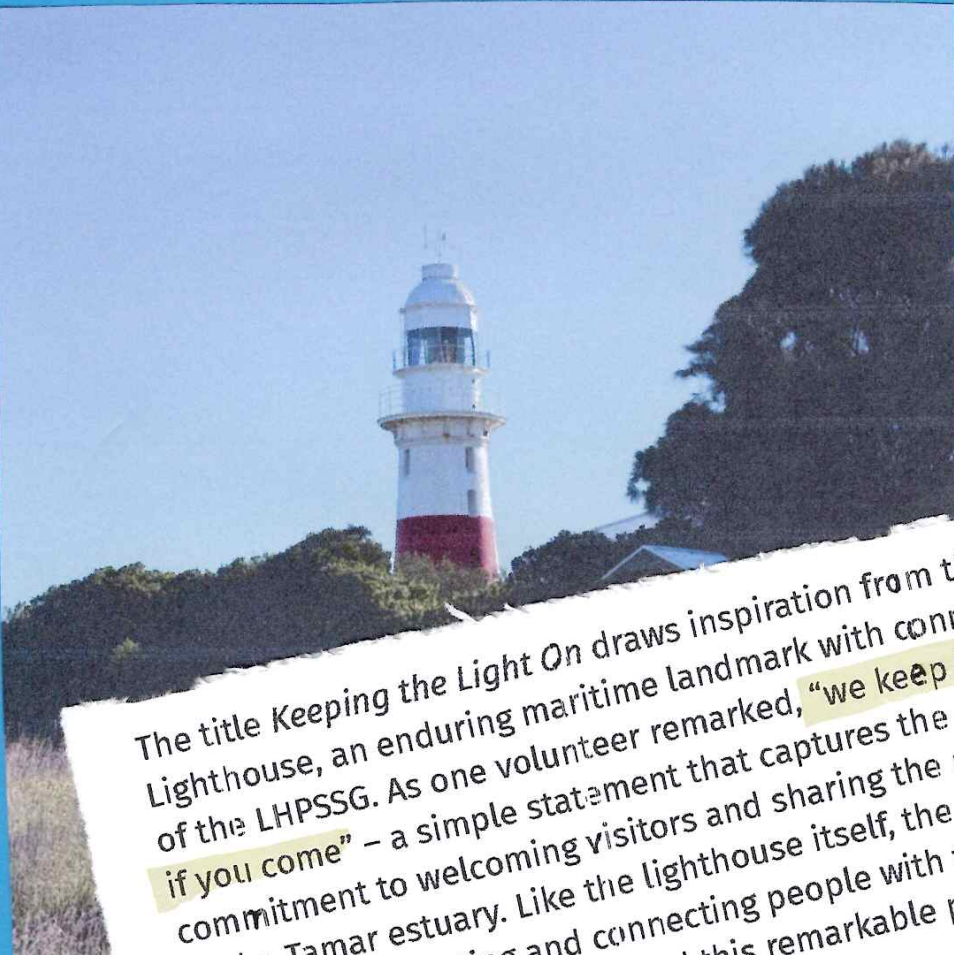
About the Low Head Pilot Station Support Group

Established in 2001, the Low Head Pilot Station Support Group Inc. (LHPSSG) is a volunteer-run organisation dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich maritime heritage of northern Tasmania's Tamar estuary. Based at the historic Low Head Pilot Station near the mouth of the Tamar River, a heritage precinct under the custodianship of Tasmania Parks & Wildlife Service, the LHPSSG manages the Low Head Pilot Station Maritime Museum, located within the heritage-listed Pilot's Row buildings. Founded originally by employees of the Port of Launceston Authority, the museum now encompasses thirteen rooms of displays as well as surrounding heritage infrastructure including storage sheds, a boatshed and, at the Low Head Lighthouse, the historic fog horn and Marine Education Centre. Through the work of the LHPSSG volunteers, the museum operates year-round, welcoming visitors into one of Australia's oldest continuously operating pilot stations.

The work of the LHPSSG is focused on the long and complex maritime history of the Tamar River, whose shifting channels and hazardous entrance have required skilled pilotage since the early nineteenth century. The pilot service at Low Head dates back to 1805, making it one of the oldest connected to European settlement of Australia, and the site remains an important place for understanding Tasmania's colonial and maritime past. The Support Group cares for extensive collections of artefacts, photographs, maps, charts, vessel drawings and marine records, many of which have been indexed to support historical research. Volunteers also assist descendants and researchers seeking information about people connected to the pilot service and maritime industries of the region.



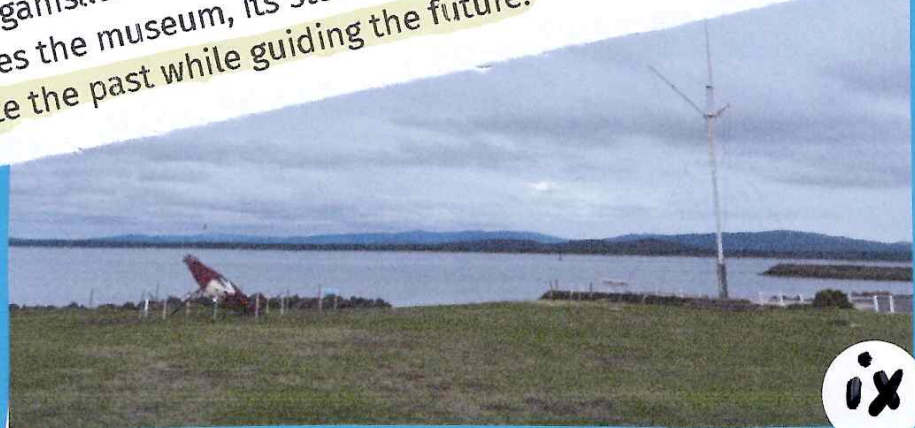
Alongside preserving material heritage, the LHPSSG plays a significant role in community education and cultural tourism. Its volunteer workforce – which numbers approximately 30 – enables the regular sounding of the historic fog horn, public access to the Marine Education Centre and a range of interactive experiences for children and families. The organisation has received recognition for its contributions to tourism and hospitality, including for its partnership with Children's University Australasia and its commitment to accessible maritime education. In sustaining both the physical site and the stories connected to it, the LHPSSG demonstrates the vital role community heritage organisations play in maintaining local history, intergenerational knowledge and regional identity.



The title *Keeping the Light On* draws inspiration from the Low Head Lighthouse, an enduring maritime landmark with connections to the work of the LHPSSG. As one volunteer remarked, "we keep the light on for you if you come" – a simple statement that captures the organisation's commitment to welcoming visitors and sharing the rich maritime history of the Tamar estuary. Like the lighthouse itself, the Support Group exists as a guide; educating and connecting people with the stories, collections and traditions that have shaped this remarkable place since early colonial times.



Keeping the Light On also signals how organisational sustainability depends on the steady, often unseen work of volunteer stewardship. Throughout our conversations, volunteers spoke about the challenge of recruiting successors, maintaining leadership, balancing continuity with change and ensuring the museum remains open for future generations. Sustaining the organisation, then, is not only about caring for buildings, collections and maritime heritage, but about keeping alive the people, knowledge and commitment that make these possible. As such, *Keeping the Light On* names organisational sustainability as an ongoing act of care – one that ensures the museum, its stories and its community continue to illuminate the past while guiding the future.



Outline of this zine: What's inside?

Content for this zine was created during a two-hour workshop conducted on 14 May 2026. Contributors to the zine are Des (Chairman), Lorraine (Secretary), Jill (Treasurer) and Anne (a member of George Town & District Historical Society which has its records housed at the Low Head Pilot Station Museum – see other zine in this series). Sarah, one of the project's co-leads, guided the volunteers through three activities aimed at getting them to think creatively about organisational sustainability.

The first activity invited participants to jot down on sticky notes words that came to mind when they thought of 'organisational sustainability'. The volunteers were then asked to consider how those words are connected and to capture those connections by arranging the sticky notes purposefully on a piece of card.



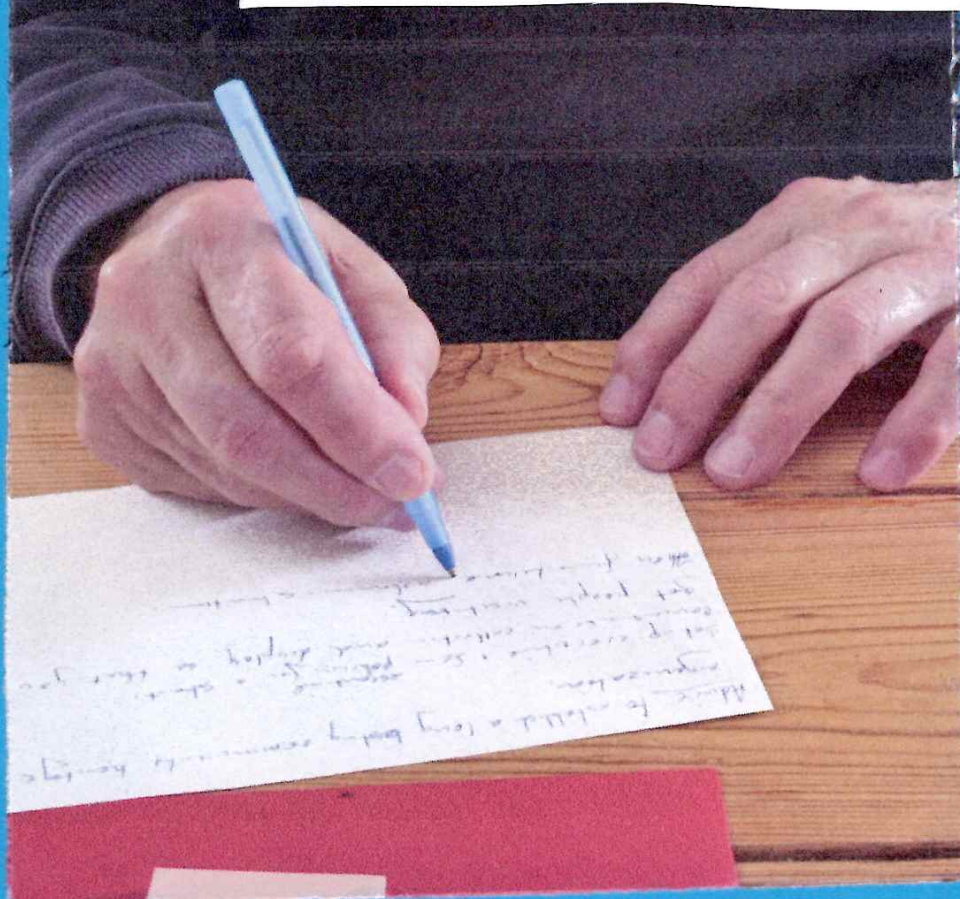
Next, we turned to an activity where participants were invited to collectively reflect on the organisational sustainability trajectory of the Support Group. They were asked to look back on past hurdles to sustainability and things that might have enabled the organisation to build a strong foundation. They were then asked to look ahead to future hazards the organisation might encounter and what they might need to do differently to counter those challenges.

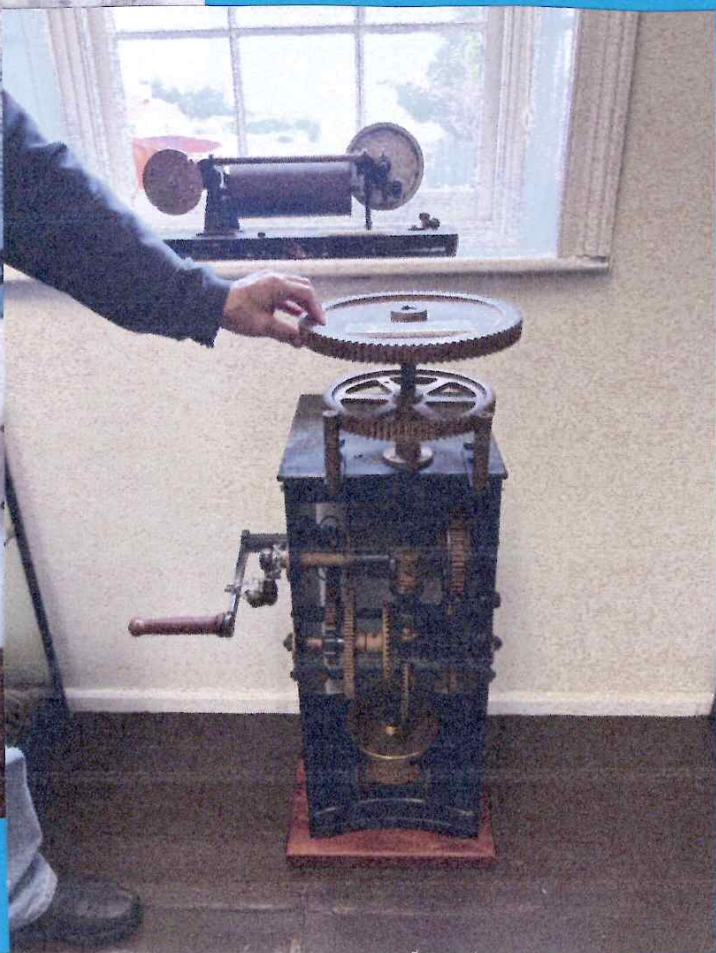


Our final activity involved participants responding to writing prompts that encouraged reflections on advice to organisations starting out and the rewards of being a volunteer.

Also dispersed throughout this zine are excerpts from an interview undertaken with Des, as well as snippets of discussions that took place during the zine workshop.

Sarah Baker
Zelmarie Cantillon



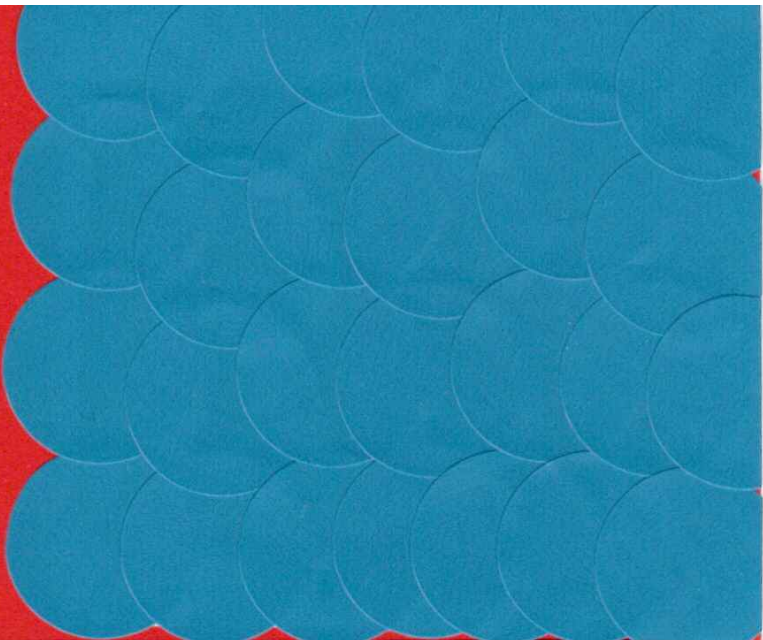


I came in probably in the first year, just after they'd started. ... I just came in to help because I had practical skills and I'd help the curator at that stage. Then I was on the committee, and then I think I was deputy chairman. Then ... the chairman died. A couple of years before [passing away], he gave up [the role] because he couldn't handle [it]. We did try, a couple of people had short goes, but it didn't work out. So I said, "Well, it's got to be me otherwise it will fold up." So I took over as chairman. ... I don't know how many years ago that was, six to 10. Anyway, I've been chairman ever since.

Executive availability

Volunteers availability

Available location space.

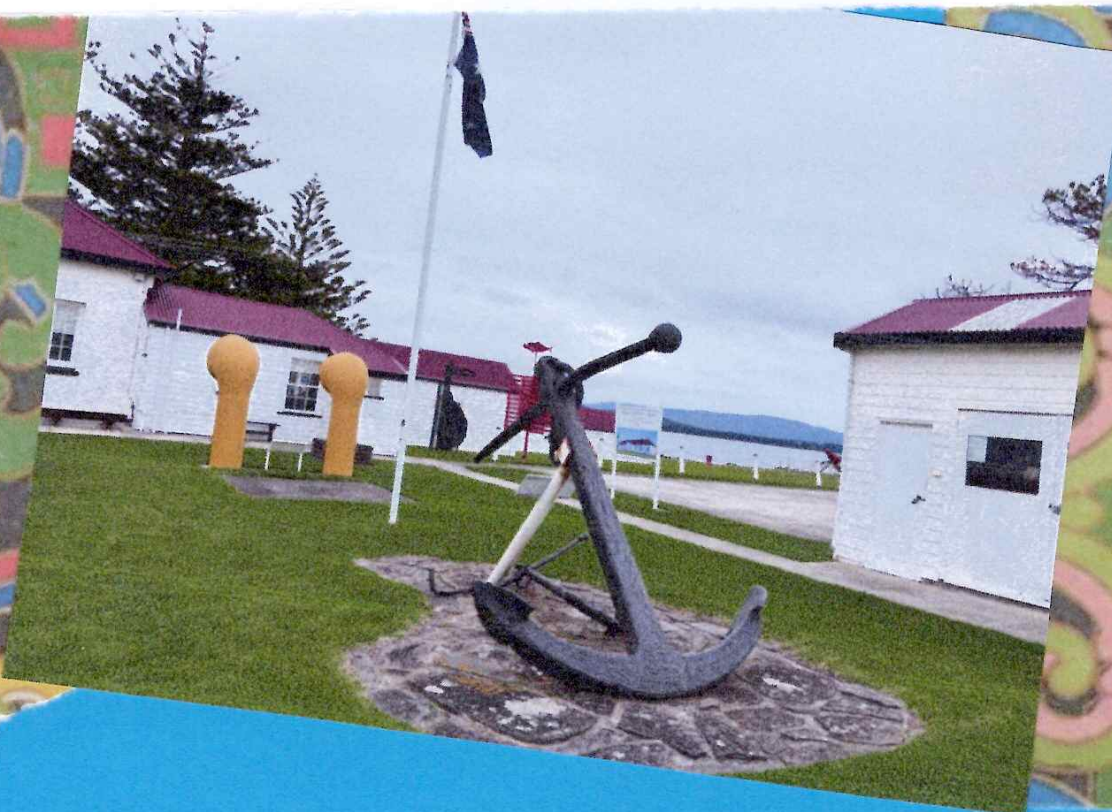


Des: We're down a bit on outside help. One of the fellows [who worked on the grounds], he's been pretty crook ... We did have a[nother] good fellow, he went back to [the mainland]. That's the trouble, they come and they go. So we're a little bit short outside. [And] we're now a little bit short in the meet and greet because we had a fellow in his 90s [who needs to retire].



Sarah: What sort of ages are the volunteers?

Des: They vary. They're probably mostly old. Some of them are young, to us. They're all mostly finished work. We've got a few younger [who come to us via the NDIS and Centrelink]. ... It's up and down a bit, our volunteering. ... Yeah, we could do with just a couple more. ...



Sarah: So what does recruitment look like?

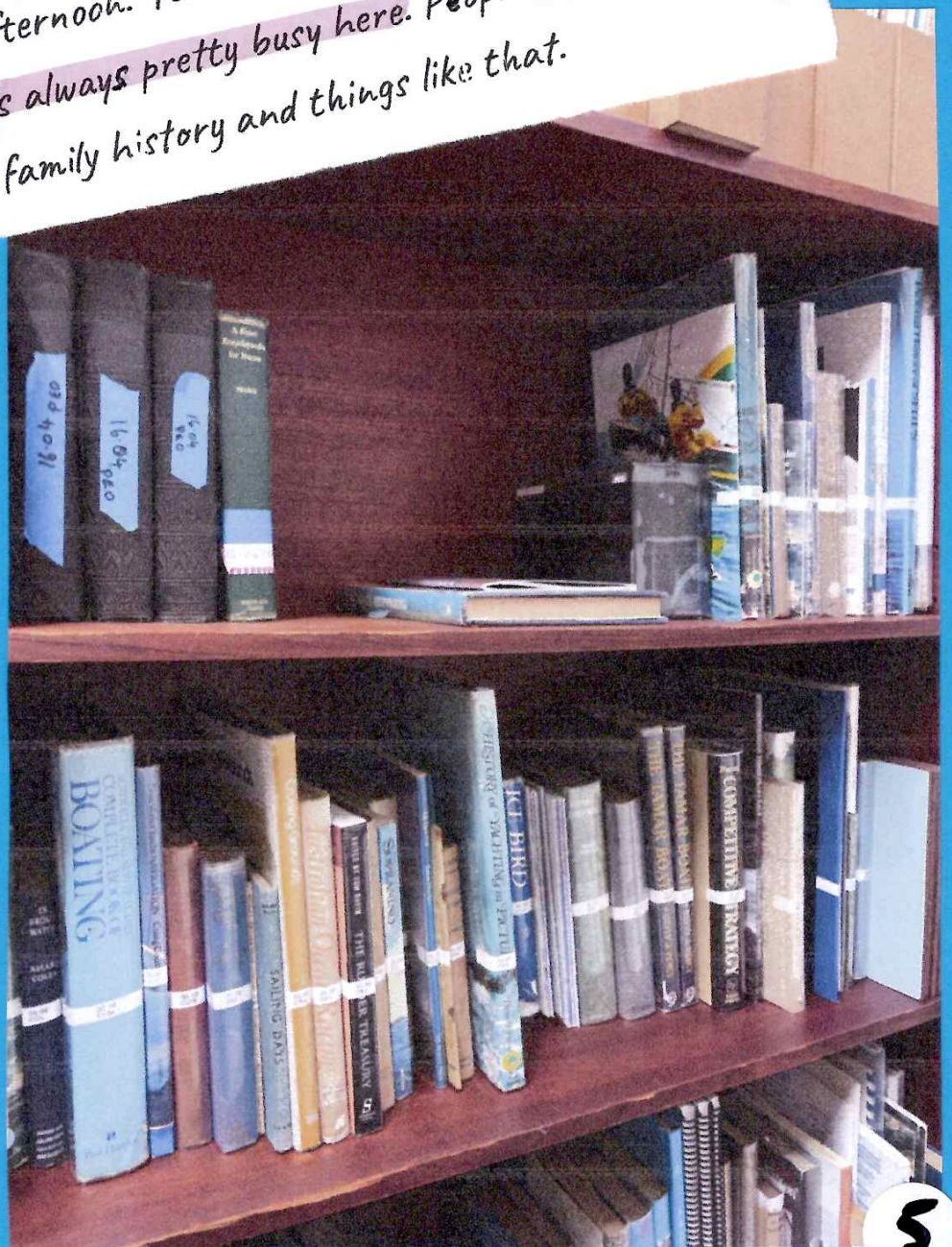
Des: It's a bit hard. I don't get around as much as I used to, probably. I don't know as many people ... It's a bit hard, but it's not only us. In George Town they've got problems at the Information Centre, they've got problems down at the Bass and Flinders [Maritime Museum] getting volunteers. And we've always been pretty right. Often they'll come along, someone, but we've got to do a little bit of chasing at the moment. ...



Sarah: What do you think are the key challenges for the Support Group?

Des: I suppose the biggest challenge is to find volunteers all the time. It's been a bit of a challenge with some of the little things that need doing outside, because we've lost a lot of our outside workers. There's a few jobs outside that have been sitting for a few years that want doing, like the fence. We painted the outside, but the inside needs painting and things like that. That's not a big challenge, but it is a bit of a challenge.

Here at the Pilot Station, you've got something going all the time. You've got the daily roster for the meet and greet, so there's always something going on here. Yesterday I was flat out. ... I didn't get home till quarter to five.... I had one thing I had to do for [Tasmania] Parks [& Wildlife Service, who manage the Pilot Station], and I finally got around to that. And the [volunteer] that was doing the books, I wanted to get some of these books catalogued for her, ready to put them on the shelf. I did some of that yesterday afternoon. Yesterday morning, I did a couple of other things. It's always pretty busy here. People come in and want help with family history and things like that.



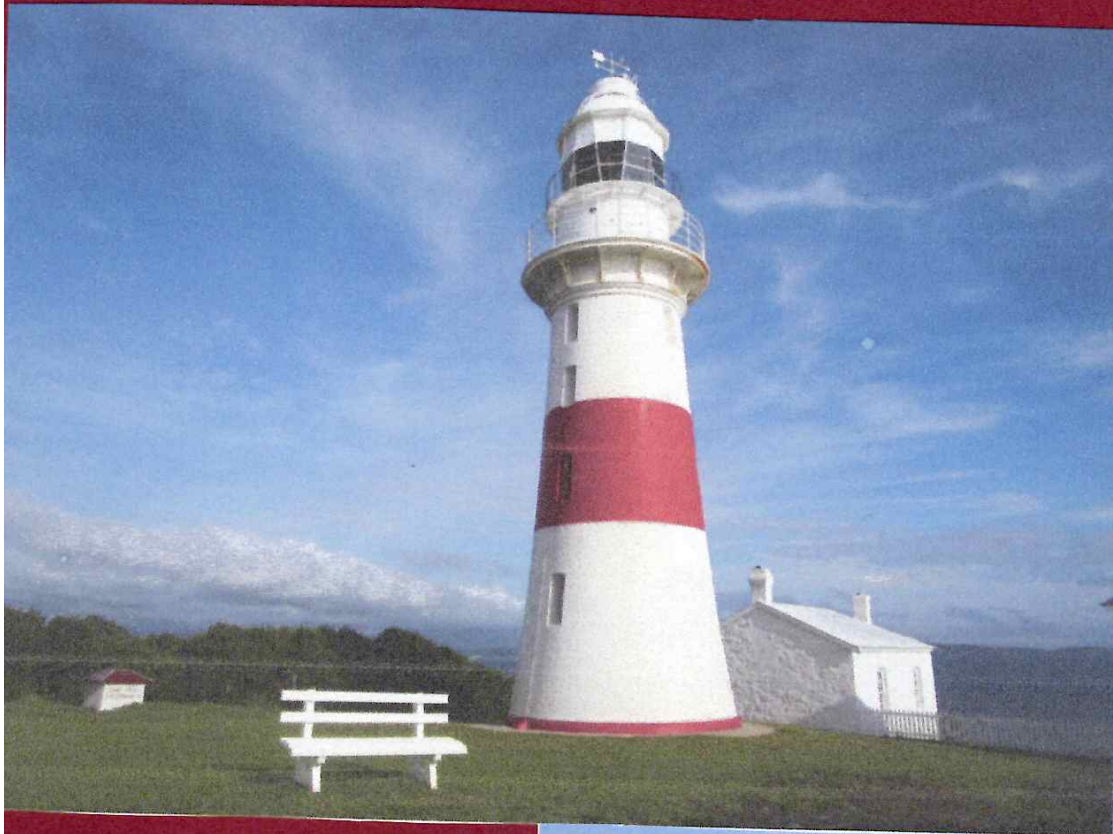
Like minded
people

Lived local
experience

Historical
interest

with a

and a

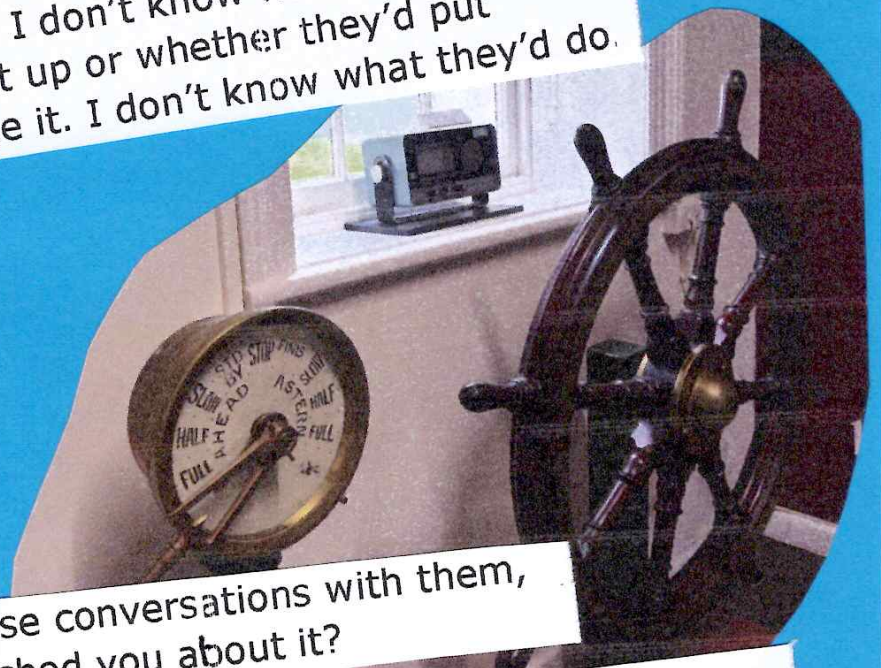


Sarah: What are the top five priorities of the Support Group over the next five years to maintain a sustainable organisation?

Des: Well, maintaining volunteers, that'd have to be –

Sarah: Number one.

Des: I would say one of the priorities is to try and seek people capable of doing these administration jobs. It's hard to plan them, you've just got to wait till someone appears. You can approach people when you know they're retiring. They'd be priorities. And the priority is just to keep the museum going. ... And being able to manage it. And if we've got to pay someone, then we probably will. If everything folded, I don't know what would happen because [Tasmania] Parks [& Wildlife Service] would have to step in [as custodians of the Pilot Station precinct]. I don't know what they'd do, whether they'd close it up or whether they'd put someone in to manage it. I don't know what they'd do.



Sarah: Have you ever had those conversations with them, or have they ever approached you about it?

Des: No. In our constitution ... if it folded, we've got to – and our constitution says that everything here that we own – ... anything that's here goes to another similar organisation. So what would happen, I don't know. If it came down to the crunch and it had to be emptied, I imagine the stuff would be offered to the Maritime Museum of Tasmania, Launceston museums, different people like that. Or [Parks] might decide to put a manager in and just manage it. I don't know.

Visitors -

Gaining
Volunteers

End of the
road

Looking back, what have been the hurdles to
Low Head Pilot Station Support Group's
viable future?

People with
skills

Downtown Schools

Jill: The people who visit, they say:

“how magnificent.” ...

People have told me that ours is the best museum they've been to; not only in Tasmania, but elsewhere, in Sydney, Hobart, wherever. ...

Des: There's people, ... locals who have been here all their lives, that wouldn't have ever been to the museum. ... As far as tourism in the State's concerned, we've got one problem. We're on the end of the road. We're not on a highway. So if you're on the highway you go to Ross, you go to Campbell Town, you go to Westbury, you go to Deloraine, you go to all these places. You've got to come way out here to this. That's always been a hurdle.



Jill: But we do say:

“we keep the light on for you if you come”.

It's the lighthouse, of course.

Dedicated
people (retirees)

Promotion

Media promotion
in the past -
Examiner - regional
news.
Tamar Valley News
promoted our places
and activities

Looking back, what has been propelling
the Low Head Pilot Station Support
Group towards attaining a long-term
future?

State advertising
per Newspaper.

Maintaining high
standard of
museum

Peter Cox &
Wayne Shipp

Advice to establish a long lasting community heritage organization. —

Set up executive + few essential
concentrate on collection and display so that you
get people visiting.

Then fine tune.
eg - cataloguing, admin, station, etc.
indexing.

Demise of
Volunteers

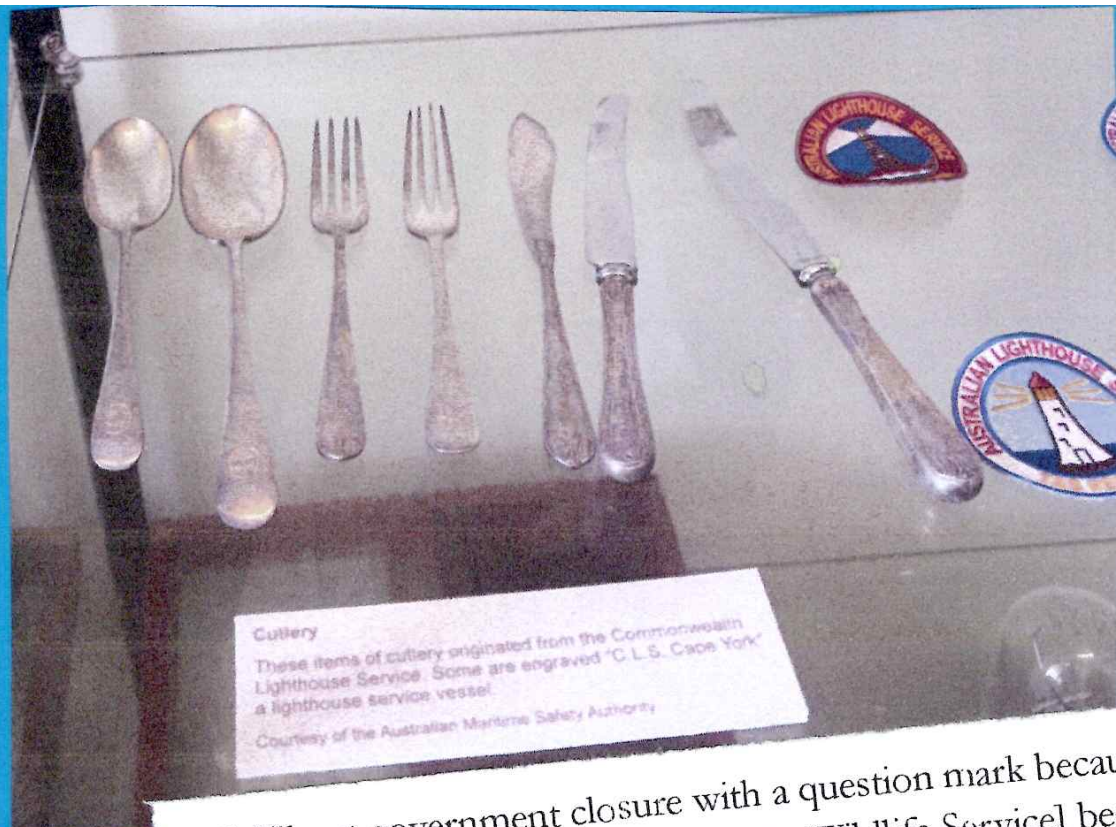
Government
closure?

LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT ARE THE FORESEEABLE HAZARDS THE LOW
HEAD PILOT STATION SUPPORT GROUP MIGHT FACE THAT PUT THE
ORGANISATION AT RISK?

FINANCIAL

VISITORS
(ATTRACTING)

Aging Admin



Cutlery

These items of cutlery originated from the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service. Some are engraved "C.L.S. Cape York" a lighthouse service vessel.

Courtesy of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Jill: I'll put government closure with a question mark because we have to deal with [Tasmania] Parks [& Wildlife Service] because they're the overseers.

Sarah: And so there's always kind of this body up there who has your fate in their hands?

Des: Yeah, well, we talked about that before, didn't we Sarah, about what would happen if we – or whether the Parks would employ someone to run the museum, or whether the stuff would be distributed to other museums. You don't know. It's just –

Jill: ... We can't sell it or do anything like that. It's got to be passed.

Des: Well, yeah, according to our constitution, but that's not Parks' constitution, is it?

Jill: They'd probably sell it off, yes, but then again, they might have a giant bonfire too. You just don't know. It all depends if it's 5th of November [Guy Fawkes Night].

Des: I think there's enough interest in Parks to keep it going nowadays.

Lorraine: I do, too.

maintain
relationships with
key people at
Maritime Museum (Hobart)
QVMAG
TMAG

Refer to the
need for
Volunteers
within G.Town.
community.

Looking ahead, what does the Low Head Pilot
Station Support Group need to do differently to
overcome the foreseeable future challenges?

library catalogue
online &

apply for
grants for
specific
projects

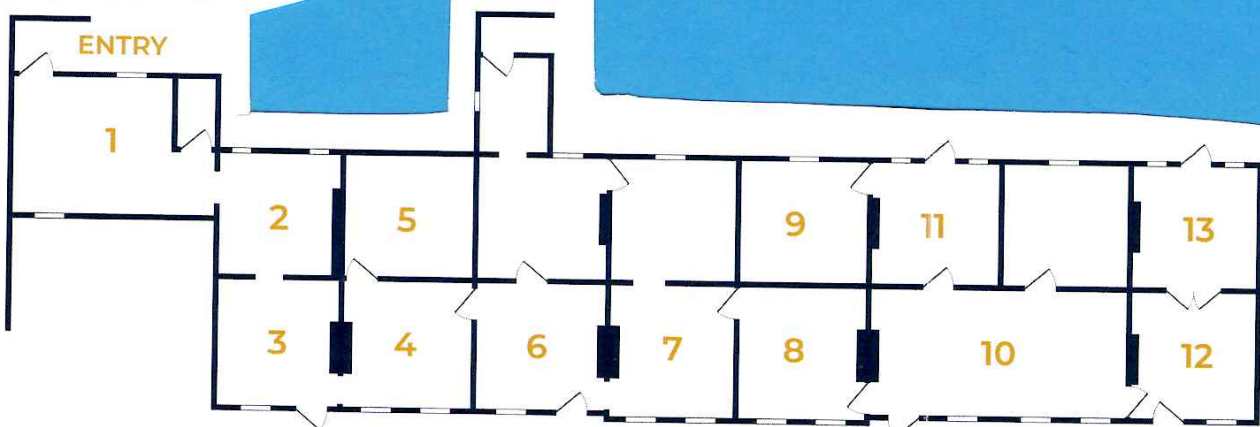
LOW HEAD PILOT STATION *Maritime Museum*

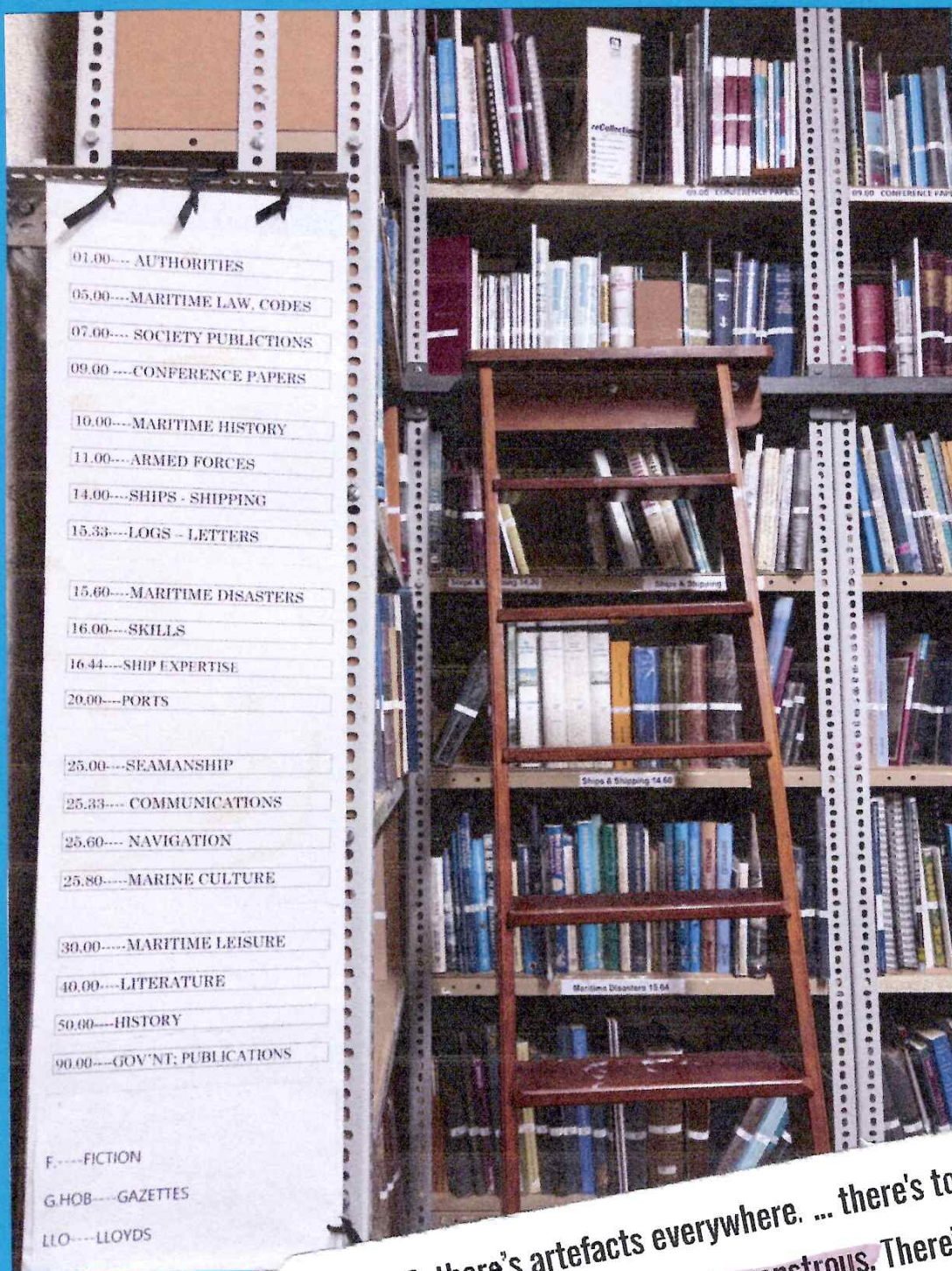
EXPLORE LOW HEAD'S LIVING HISTORY

Discover THE MUSEUM

13 rooms dedicated to telling the exciting story of life at the Low Head Pilot Station

1. **Entry and History Room** - Discover why the Pilot Station is vital to maritime safety and find out about navigating the entry to the Tamar.
2. **Whaling & Sealing** - Explore these industries, which were once important for Launceston.
3. **Pilotage Room** - Learn about the pilots' job.
4. **Diving Room** - Discover how deep sea diving was done before the invention of SCUBA.
5. **Navigation Room** - Could you have piloted vessels into the treacherous mouth of the Tamar?
6. **Ponrabbel Room** - Wonder at man's attempts to fight the force of nature & keep the sea route to Launceston's doorstep open.
7. **Shipwrecks Room** - Explore treasures from the many ships wrecked in the area.
8. **Signalling & Lights Room** - Understand how lighting and signalling are vital to ship safety.
9. **Telegraph Room** - Find out how semaphore and the telegraph kept the community informed of events.
10. **Sir Raymond Ferrall Exhibition Room** - Changing exhibitions highlighting maritime history.
11. **Rigging Room** - Tie yourself in knots learning how to make a vessel shipshape.
12. **Low Head Room** - Understand how important the sea and river are to the Low Head region.
13. **Shipwrights' Room** - Boat building tools and history of Tamar boatbuilders.





Here at the [Museum], there's artefacts everywhere. ... there's tonnes of things in here. And our library and archives is monstrous. There's photographs, we'd probably have 10,000. And we've got heaps and heaps of boxed archive files, we've got lots of old books, lots of old records from the Marine Board. We've got our library which is pretty good, pretty big. And as I say, nearly all that is catalogued.



WHO WILL
MANAGE IN
THE FUTURE?

Health
problems

Aging
Volunteers

Volunteers'
experience/
interest/
commitment

~~How~~ Can we
afford to
pay a
manager

More
Volunteers!

Other
commitments

RESILIENCE SCALE

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Sarah: On a scale of one to 10, one being low and then 10 being high, how resilient do you think the Pilot Station Support Group is to change?

Des: I wouldn't say it's very high. We're pretty well organised, we've got lots of policies. We change little things, but not big changes. So that'd be halfway, I reckon. ... I'm quite happy to listen to things to change, but I don't think a lot of people want to change. I think there'd be a bit of a problem. Sometimes people come in and want to do things like that and you lose other people, that's the problem.

Sarah: So it's a bit of a balancing act between keeping things as they are, and then people come in with some different ideas and that will turn other people off. It's a challenge.

Des: And you do, you get people [who] come into the area and they'll come in and want to change the world just for the sake of it. We're running pretty well, we're making a small profit all the time, we're not losing money or anything like that. We're not struggling for money. We can do our little jobs.

I know some people would like to change it, but I would be against it, a lot of things. I just like to roll along with what's been done before. We've got our policies and things. If we want to look at a policy, we can. We've got policies for all our collections, we've got policies for life membership, we've got different things.



Sarah: Do you have disaster planning policies, or succession planning, or anything like that?

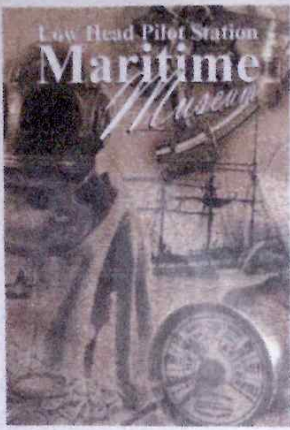
Des: Well, succession is the problem, it's probably the biggest problem here, getting people - I don't know how you can plan. You've just got to have the right person come along, and that's pretty hard.

Who will manage in the future? Can we afford to pay a manager?

We need more volunteers. And volunteers [with] experience, interest, and commitment – you don't want someone that's not going to turn up. They are all volunteers, ... so you don't have to come ... you can say "no," but you like volunteers to be fairly committed. But then you've got to have someone to cover when people don't turn up.



I'm just thinking of, in our house, ageing for volunteers – ... the executive people as well as others ... Health problems as well. All those things are impacting as we get older. The ageing, I think that's the same in every organisation. People are getting older and you just wonder: "Who's going to come along to take your place?" Because we're not going to be here forever. ... Because people have died that have had a big impact on the [organisation] and taken leadership roles ... You know, you just wonder "who's going to step into our shoes? After."



Low Head Pilot Station Maritime Museum
 10000 Highway 100, Low Head, Tasmania 7305
 Tel: 03 6338 1111 Fax: 03 6338 1112
 Email: info@lowheadmuseum.org.au
 Website: www.lowheadmuseum.org.au

Admission - Adults
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Children
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Family
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Pensioner
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Student
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Teacher
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Volunteer
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.

Admission - Other
 The museum is open to all and the entry is free. This is a great introduction to the maritime history of the Low Head area. The museum is a great place to visit for all ages and is a great place to learn about the maritime history of the Low Head area.



Museum Opening Hours
 10 am until 4 pm

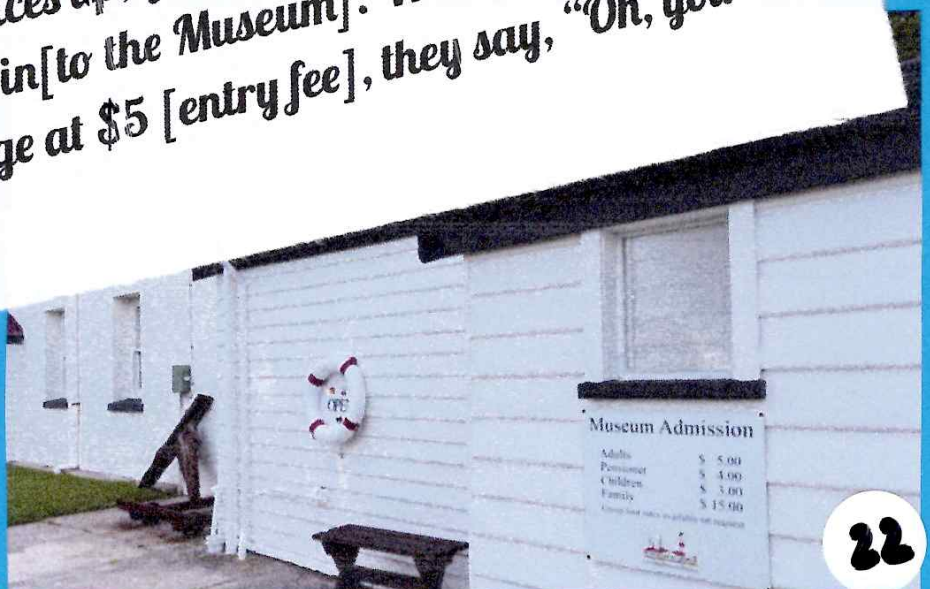
Museum Admission Prices

Adults	\$5.00
Concession	\$4.00
Children	\$3.00
Family	\$15.00

Group Tour Rates available on request



There's often been a little bit of talk about what we'll do after I'm gone, you see. So we're talking that we might have to pay someone for a few hours to run the rosters, and the general run of the place. ... I always resisted, I said, "We've got to try and get volunteers if we can, because if we start paying someone we might have to put our [entry] prices [to the museum] up a bit." ... We've always been able to keep our prices very low, which is good, and a lot of people appreciate that. We've even had people come and say we're too cheap. But a lot of people, they appreciate being able to get in cheaply. And I reckon if you put your prices up, you're going to cut the amount of people that come in[to the Museum]. We do sometimes get people that renege at \$5 [entry fee], they say, "Oh, you've got to pay?"



The most rewarding thing about being part of the Support Group is -

- telling visitors about the history of the area and answering any questions they may have.
- hearing their accolades about what they saw/read whilst walking through the rooms.

The fact that our entry fees are $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of entry fees of similar displays - the visitors are in awe. As Volunteers, we are pleased to accept their thanks and pleasure at taking the time to visit. Many times visitors state they just "came across the Museum" in their travels.

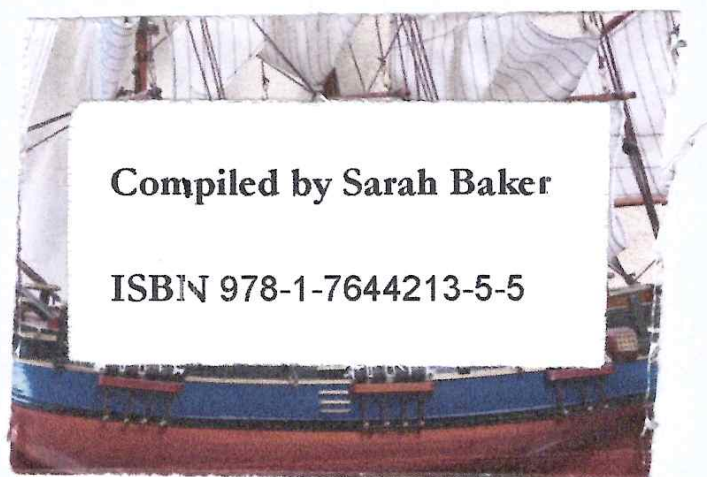
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the volunteers of the Low Head Pilot Station Support Group who engaged with this research. Your willingness to share experiences and offer your views on the sector's organisational sustainability are central to creating a zine series that captures viable futures for community heritage organisations.

Special thanks to Lorraine for being Sarah's main point of contact for the research and for helping to arrange the zine workshop. Thanks to Des and Lorraine for providing their shack as a space to run the workshop and Lorraine for catering the pre-workshop sustenance.

Some images used throughout the zine were provided courtesy of Lorraine, with the organisation also providing use of brochures. Others were taken by Sarah during fieldwork or sourced from databases of public domain images.

99	COMMENTS PLEASE
1342 SA Lauriston (NSW) Beach Maryong Rd NSW A. Vic A. QLD PEN. VIC Winds NZ QLD	Grew up at Pilot Station, daughter of Capt Alex Barker. Wonderful childhood here. Museum Outstanding. Peter Rayler. Loved it, will be back BRILLIANT EXHIBITION Great Place to visit Great information + exhibits Great exhibits Wonderful! Wonderful Experience Very interesting. Wonderful display, great job!



Compiled by Sarah Baker

ISBN 978-1-7644213-5-5