

VEAC Assessment of Victoria's Coastal Reserves.

Geelong Environment Council (GEC) is pleased to make a submission on the Draft VEAC Report.

Comments on the purpose of the assessment

GEC notes that there is a diversity in titles and management priorities for many coastal reserves. The reservation of all reserves should now become 'permanently reserved.'

The actual number of reserves is not considered a problem. GEC recommends that all boundaries are retained and if possible extended, particularly where coastal strips are narrow or vegetation is fragmented..

It is recommended that Victorian coastline areas which do not have an area of coastal public land are reviewed in order to create a coastal reserve by acquisition.

The protection of native vegetation, covering all EVCs should be an aim of the review. Management to protect and enhance and enlarge vegetation areas and protect from development is important. All facilities for visitors or coastal industries must be placed with consideration to vegetation values, landscape and cultural heritage.

Regional area inventories of valuable vegetation, including the presence of invasive species and pest animals, should be identified with maintenance work carried out by the management authority. When possible assistance of community groups should be encouraged. (Involvement of the community creates a greater appreciation of and pride in an area as well as connecting the local community with the natural asset.

Ensure that car parks and access tracks and facilities do not encroach on vegetated areas and are placed with minimum effect on the landscape values..

It is suggested opportunities to protect or construct biolinks with vegetated inland public or parkland are investigated.

An inventory of reserves with high environmental, landscape and other values should be available with management required to protect and enhance the values in the long term

Sea Level Rise

Coastal areas subject to inundation from sea level rise have been identified in the Geelong and Bellarine area. COGG has passed an amendment to provide overlays to protect these areas from development. Queenscliffe Borough has not undertaken a planning amendment at this time.

GEC is particularly concerned at the loss of beach and water front and salt marsh fringing wetland areas. These are vital for feeding shorebirds and migratory waders. It is suggested that planning schemes are required to identify this problem and to take action to protect adjacent inland areas. These may need to be protected from development to allow a migration of the vegetation inland.

(It is understood that migratory avifauna feeding areas in the Lake Victoria and surrounding areas are affected by increased water run off from an adjacent housing development causing a loss of shallow feeding areas).

Future Growth

GEC supports a process to identify current uses of reserves and changes which are arising from an increased population'. These include wide use of mountain and trail bikes, water jet skis and an increase in recreational fishers and swimmers. Management will need to take actions to contain these activities in appropriate zones.

In the past land clearance has reduced coastal vegetation. Where possible restoration management should be applied to restore vegetation and repair sand dune erosion.

.Do purposes reflect current and future values.

Management strategies will be required to ensure that the designated uses and protections are achieved. The multiplicity of management agencies, both state and municipal will require strong government directives.

An example in Queenscliff - Council is the delegated manager in some projects and has preferred to ignore State Government requirements and strategies.

It is not necessary for all reserves to be designated a particular use and value as many are multi-purpose. However, designation and management priorities will be appropriate for some uses. The example of the Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff Lighthouse Reserves have Victorian Heritage listing protection and enhancement must take priority in management, protection and visitor use.

The usage of coastal land will continue to increase with an ever-growing population. Recognition that the need to control numbers of visitors and activities is important. An example is the number of tourist buses on the Great Ocean Road which cause huge congestion and traffic hold-ups. If the large number of visitors continues to grow without any control of numbers the whole area will lose its appeal and perhaps be degraded.

GEC urges the Victorian Government to maintain Parks Victoria management of all areas of the GOR National and Marine Parks. The proposal for management of areas of these parks to be transferred to the Great Ocean Road Management Authority is most disturbing and a bad precedent. Management of areas of high environmental and related values should be entrusted to the authority with the greatest skills and knowledge.

Purposes of Coastal Reserves

The prime purpose must be to protect environmental values together with landscape and water features. The opportunities for visitor or tourist facilities must not be permitted to degrade environmental or cultural values.

GEC recommends that 'Traditional Owners' are involved in the management process and cultural heritage values protected.

An example of a valuable environmental area coming under pressure for development of recreation trails is the following - a coastal nature reserve, Buckley Park, and its undeveloped hinterland including the coastal dune area with a RCZ zone on the inland side. Mountain bikes and bike riders wish to have a trail between Ocean Grove and Point Lonsdale suitable for bikes, walkers perhaps on a separate trail. The area is the only coastal and Rural Conservation zone, complete with transitory wetlands and coastal woodland, remaining on the Bellarine Peninsula.

GEC is opposing this, Buckley Park which is a narrow dune system would be destroyed if a track is constructed within it, and the undeveloped farmland if

used for walking tracks and bike trails would lose its very important habitat and feeding area for migratory and resident birdlife. The area includes Lake Victoria, an integral component of the Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar area.

A threat to safety in the coastal reserves and beaches is the presence of dogs. GEC has found it impossible to ensure dogs are kept on leads in public places, as many owners do not feel compelled to comply with appropriate regulations.

We note that many volunteers commit hundreds of hours in protecting the Hooded Plovers during their breeding season. Protection of these coastline areas and reserves from both dogs running free and beach goers being unaware of should be a high priority.

A coastal issue which is inappropriate, environmentally damaging and dangerous for beach goers is the proposed horse training areas near Warrnambool. We recognise that training on the beach has ceased at the present time but still has a government permit. GEC urges that this beach and coastal use becomes a no-go area for racehorse training.

We note that some councils spend significant funds on clearing seaweed from beaches, as at Queenscliff front beach. We urge the VEAC report to inform management bodies that the presence of seaweed is important for shorebirds for feeding, insects, shelter and habitat.

Seagrass and salt marsh play an important role in sequestering carbon- it is important that reserve managers are mindful of the importance of sea- cv grass for carbon banking and for retaining fish breeding areas. Moolap and Point Henry coastal saltmarsh and adjacent seagrass are immensely important in the Geelong /Bellarine area and must be protected from any reduction in area.

Joan Lindros GEC Secretary

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VEAC Coastal Reserve Assessment

Geelong Environment Council additional comments to the VEAC assessment of Victoria's Coastal Reserves

Suggestions for the Final Report in regard to Queenscliff

Victoria Park (former Botanic Garden) and Golightly Park should be individually listed on the Queenscliffe map. Both are important for environmental reasons together with their existing camping facilities. The earlier designation of Victoria Park as a Botanic Park should be noted.

It is disturbing for coastal reserves to be designated as SUZ which allows activities which are frequently in conflict with the values of the reserve. It is recommended that all coastal reserves are zoned PCRZ so that any proposal must go through a public consultation process.

GEC urges DELWP to support the addition of Lakers Cutting on the fringe of Swan Bay to be added to the Bellarine Ramsar listed area. The values for bird habitat are well documented.

Commonwealth owned land (the Fort and Swan Island) which have significant values both environmentally and historically on a national scale, are important for protection into the future.

Protection of the sea walls in Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale is shared between DELWP and the Borough of Queenscliffe. Currently increased storm surges now occurring will place great pressure on the integrity of the bluestone walls. Restoration and repair will constitute a major cost. It is important that responsibility for their maintenance between Council and State is defined and understood.

GEC urges that all reserves currently managed by Parks Victoria remain so. Privatisation of management of Queenscliff's harbour from PV has resulted in increased boating fees by 10%. GEC does not support coastal facilities or reserves becoming privately owned or managed.

THE Borough of Queenscliffe has 64% of coastal reserves temporarily reserved for public purposes. GEC recommends that a full 100% is declared as Permanently Reserved.

It is essential that Councils with responsibility for management of coastal reserves prepare an action plan to deal with both threats to private land and

inundation of the reserve system. It is important, and must be a requirement for all councils to prepare a planning scheme amendment for private land, and to include planning for increased areas for environmental protection to compensate for habitat areas lost to sea-level rise in the reserve system..

The Queenscliffe Borough Council has a history of ignoring directives for the management of public land which are contained in State Government Strategies and Policies. This is unacceptable and causes community opposition.

A directive in the final report to remind Councils that State Government requirements contained in State Policies and Strategies must be met in all proposed developments .

Joan Lindros GEC