

## VEAC Statewide Assessment of Public Land - Discussion Paper August 2016:

### Submission and Comment:

The work that has been done by LCC/ECC/VEAC in developing recommendations for the State's public Land has been instrumental to the successful establishment of the integrated reserve system for public land in Victoria. However, fundamental to the fulfilment of this substantially important work is the presence of effective and efficient management of these environments to ensure that the directions and recommendations of the studies undertaken are realised. Whilst this has occurred to a great degree with regards to the higher category status areas such as national parks and so on, the lack of follow through with respect to other conservation reserves such as coastal reserves has been lacking and has given rise to perverse outcomes of inappropriate uses occurring within these areas.

The values of the lower category reserves under the various recommendations described and as accepted by government, must be protected and given priority in determining usage and management of all public land reviewed, especially the Coastal and Marine environments. Sadly, this is not the case under the current management arrangements for coastal areas.

Large tracts of Victoria's coast are wild and near natural areas with considerable Traditional Owner, Environmental and Social values. The current management arrangements and structure do not provide anywhere near what is needed to protect these important values and are compromised by:-

- Lack of government follow through on existing public land planning processes, particularly LCC/ECC/VEAC recommendations for reserves.
- Lack of described and determined management arrangements to implement the directions of state-wide and government endorsed recommendations.
- Lack of resources and regulations to allow management (if any exists), to ensure that inappropriate, conflicting and damaging uses do not occur in reserved area of the Coast.

I offer a case study of Belfast Coastal Reserve. This Reserve is described in the LCC Corangamite Area Final Recommendations 1978, COASTAL RESERVES as:-

"J2 The coastal frontage land from Lady Bay, City of Warrnambool to Griffiths Island, Borough of Port Fairy (now Moyne Shire)."

Recommendations for Coastal Reserves are:-

J1-J2 That the areas listed below and shown on the maps

(a) Be used to:

- (i) Provide opportunities for informal recreation for large numbers of people, and also for recreation related to enjoying and understanding nature
- (ii) Protect and conserve natural coastal landscapes and ecosystems and geomorphological, archaeological and historic features for public enjoyment and inspiration for education and scientific study
- (iii) Ensure the conservation of aquatic littoral and terrestrial fauna and flora
- (iv) Provide facilities for shipping, fishing and boating (including harbour facilities) together with the necessary navigational aids".

Furthermore, J2 Belfast Coastal Reserve usage is described in more detail in subsequent pages with five zones including primary uses that re-iterate the above recommended uses.

Whilst having been formally accepted by government in 1979 and 1980, as yet the follow through on these recommendations has not occurred.

Consequently, we have a management arrangement that has Warrnambool City Council, Parks Victoria, Moyne Shire Council and DELWP all managing segmented sections of this important coastal strip without

any plan of management, no reservation status nor regulations and with few resources. No management plan exists for this reserve.

As a result, the significant habitat values are not being protected and all values and uses described for the Reserve by the LCC, not being facilitated nor supported. These significant values can be best described as:-

- A sandy beach system facing a long running southerly high energy wave system. This dune system contains significant aboriginal archaeological sites.
- The beaches are habitat to breeding and migratory shorebirds including the Hooded Plover, Red-capped Plover, Pied and Sooty Oyster Catcher, Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit.

In the last year or so, there has been an escalation in use of areas of this reserve by commercial horse training. This activity involves using the soft sand above the high water mark and the sand dunes for endurance and stamina training of race horses. Large numbers access the beaches within Belfast Coastal Reserve. Suffering particularly is Killarney Beach within the reserve which is subjected to up to 60 horses per day. This area is under management of Moyne Shire Council. The impacts on the soft sand, which is the habitat of the vulnerable Hooded Plover, migratory shore birds and other species, is not only destroying nest sites but also the habitat for sand fleas, sand worms and other creatures which are the bottom of the food chain and fundamental to the continuing survival of the creatures that rely on these for food. The use of the dunes for exercise work is destroying the stability of the dunes and likely to be damaging archaeological sites. The activities are at scale at Killarney that beach users such as fishermen, swimmers and other beach goers cannot access the beach because of the sheer intensity of activity and numbers of horses, horse floats and vehicles. The end result is heavily ploughed sand from the base of the dunes to the high water mark which consequently is very difficult to walk across. This unauthorised use has become an exclusive use. The training of racehorses in public areas such as this also creates significant safety issues.

The authorities are apparently powerless to remove this unauthorised activity and in fact the municipalities are even working with DEWLP to consider shifting the activity and authorising it on East Beach Port Fairy! All consequent to a complete failure of government for follow through with public land reservation, appropriate management arrangements with adequate resources and regulations for use.

If the result of this review process is merely to articulate another re-arrangement that will not bring about sensibility in management of areas such as Belfast Coastal Reserve, then all is wasted. The issues in this reserve require urgent attention and management, without which could lead to the local extinction of the Hooded Plover. Acknowledged to date as the most important breeding area in Victoria, this year's season in Belfast Coastal Reserve is shaping as a complete failure. This year the birds have been so disturbed by this invasive activity that most of the nesting efforts have been abandoned.

In terms of management of Coastal Reserves, that are set aside for conservation, recreation and such as described by the LCC, it should be that these areas, particularly Belfast Coastal Reserve be set aside as a Coastal Park and managed by Parks Victoria with appropriate regulations instituted and adequate resources available to protect these significant areas. Otherwise why do we continue to waste time, money and energy in high level planning processes? Committees of management, particularly municipalities that are rural in nature both locational and philosophically will not and cannot adequately manage Coastal Reserves. Such municipalities are too easily influenced by vested interest and not the planning status of the land in question.

Yours sincerely,

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