

VEAC

Statewide Assessment of Public Land

Submission

2/10/2016

Killarney is a small community situated on the coast between Warrnambool and Port Fairy in picturesque Southwest Victoria. An area along the coast stretching from one town to the other was set aside and first proclaimed as a public reserve in 1873. This area then became Belfast Coastal Reserve and now exists in its current form. Over the past thirty odd years there have been many studies and plans developed in regard to how best manage and preserve the reserve. These include the then **Land Conservation Council**, now VEAC, recommendations 1978 for the Corangamite area which were **accepted by the Government** of the day. These recommendations basically advised that the reserve be used for passive recreation, enjoyment of nature and preservation of wildlife and natural coastal landscapes. They are still valid to this day and according to the **VEAC Act 2001** should have been **implemented by the government**. Other Documents have been produced by Moyne Shire Council and Warrnambool City Council, Victorian Coastal Council and Western Coastal Board supporting these recommendations.

The reserve has many reefs, bays and beaches that are home to all kinds of wildlife including threatened bird species such as the **Orange Bellied Parrot and Hooded Plover**. There are also important **Aboriginal cultural** sites throughout the reserve.

Over the past eighteen months there has been an exponential increase in the amount of commercial horse trainers wanting to access the dunes and beaches for trackwork and exercise, this has ultimately resulted in conflict between horse trainers and other beach users and volunteer community groups that care for the environment and protect the wildlife. This escalated to the stage where a local community group, Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group(BCRAG), was formed in order to protect the reserve and its values. BCRAG and other likeminded groups have had several meetings with the land managers that include Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, Parks Victoria, Moyne Shire and Warrnambool City Council. At these meetings BCRAG has raised the following issues.

- Public safety is at risk, in particular on main beaches, carparks and around camping grounds
- OH&S guidelines and protocols for trackwork are being ignored
- Historical Documents and recommendations are being ignored by the land managers
- Protected wildlife and habitat is being put at risk and in some instances destroyed
- Federal and State Acts of parliament are being breached
- International obligations to areas of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas are being ignored
- Aboriginal cultural heritage is being disturbed and damaged
- No permits have been issued by Parks Vic
- It is in breach of Moyne Shires bylaws on use of public reserves

Despite this information it seems some within the land managers' departments seem determined to allow commercial horse training to proceed within the reserve.

It is believed there is a proposal to build a large carpark, that will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, to allow access for the trainers to an area of East Beach near Port Fairy. This area is popular with fishermen, surfers, walkers etc and is home to protected **Hooded Plover**. Also thousands of ratepayer dollars have been spent trying to prevent **dune erosion** in this area that has led to the exposure of an old tip site and the release of old **nightsoil and hazardous waste**. There has been little community consultation about this proposal.

It is only after being contacted by BCRAAG that Aboriginal Victoria became aware of potential interference to cultural sites that has seen a stop to commercial training in some areas. Now it would appear they are under pressure to give ground on that decision.

Recently, Upper house MP, James Purcell (former Mayor of Moyne Shire) has formed a petition to allow commercial training on Killarney Main Beach, an area heavily used by other people and adjacent to a caravan park, playground and BBQ area, despite assurances from the present Mayor that all commercial training on Killarney is to cease as of December 1st 2016. This is a public main beach that draws tourists and visitors and services the local communities need for recreation. The trainers are filling public carparks with trucks, vehicles, horses and equipment then using the boatramp and pedestrian paths to access the beach. The beach is constantly left looking like a ploughed paddock and the carparks reek of urine and manure. There have been no permits or authority given for this activity. Mr Purcell intimates that outside of the summer holiday period very few people use this area. This is not correct, many people use the area year round for passive recreation, on the beach and in and on the water. The caravan park has over one thousand site occupations per year with the **Port Fairy Folk Festival** weekend and **Easter holiday period** being very popular.

There has been suggestion that use of the beaches by trainers has been going on for 70 years. This is not so. Small scale trainers have used the beaches at times for therapeutic work over the years. That is, low impact, waters edge, wading etc. What is occurring now is high impact, large volume, base of the dunes, in the dunes training.

Signs pickets and ropes used to identify and protect **Hooded Plover** nests and chicks are being vandalized and broken. Recently there has been evidence of **tampering and disturbance** of nesting sites by as yet unidentified persons. DELWP and Parks Victoria are investigating.

BCRAAG, as a community representative is very concerned about this whole process. We represent the people who live in this area and beyond, who care about Belfast Coastal Reserve and have done for generations. This is our backyard and we care about it. Why are some of the so called responsible land managers so determined to allow a commercial entity to use public land for their own gain. If it were any another commercial enterprise trying to do this I am sure it would be stopped in its tracks.

There has been much media coverage lately, locally and metropolitan via newspaper and radio. Victorian National Parks Association have also been commenting via their outlet and support BCRAAG in their actions. Birdlife Australia is also supportive. Both these groups have written to the state environment minister about their concerns, as has BCRAAG on three separate occasions without recognition or reply.

This whole process is a farce. The land managers are showing an abrogation of their responsibilities and claim they are powerless to do anything. Why does a community group have to do their job for them?

Federal and State Acts (laws) are being broken. The Mayor and former Mayor of Moyne Shire are publicly squabbling over this issue. Proposals are being made without proper public consultation. Warrnambool City Council are meeting with the racing industry and excluding community groups. To add to all this confusion VEAC is conducting a statewide assessment of the use of all public land and are now accepting submissions with final recommendations going to the ministers' office in February 2017. Perhaps, worst of all, is that the small number of individuals that are responsible for this problem stand to be rewarded by the authorities.

Is it possible that any public land or beach that is not protected by specific regulations is open to this sort of misuse?

BCRAAG believes all this highlights the need for past recommendations to be implemented and that the reserve become a Coastal Park with regulations enforceable by one overall land manager, that being Parks Victoria

Regards
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