



Submission

Colac Otway Shire
Submission on the Draft Western Regional Coastal Plan 2015

The following is a submission to the Draft Western Regional Coastal Plan 2015-2020 (the Plan), which identifies areas of the plan we agree with and where the plan needs some modification. The overall structure and layout of the Plan is easy to follow and understand. The vision statement of the Plan and the overarching aspirations of the Victorian Coastal Strategy are strongly supported by Council.

While Council recognises the value of regional coastal planning and the achievements that have been made through the previous plans developed by the Western Coastal Board, there remains a significant gap between the aspirations of the Plan and the resource limitations of the relevant land managers. Unless more substantial and reliable funding sources are provided for coastal zone management across the state then it is impossible to make a real attempt to realise the vision of the plan.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Plan identify actions to be undertaken by a specified time. The tables also indicate the lead and support agencies for each action. The diversity of agencies listed demonstrates the need for integrated management of our coast and the importance of the regional plan to ensuring this takes place at the local level. A key element to achieving this outcome will be the integration of a number of actions in the Plan with the numerous plans of organisations along the coast.

Opportunity for Pilot Project to Assist Implementation

In acknowledgement of the issues associated with implementation (i.e. limited funding and many stakeholders) Council facilitated a meeting of key stakeholders in Apollo Bay on 16 March 2015 to discuss the Plan and more specifically the way in which the key stakeholders could work together to implement the Plan at the local level. The meeting was facilitated by Steve Blackley on behalf of the Western Coastal Board, and attended by representatives of VicRoads, Otway Coastal Committee, Barwon Water, Apollo Bay Chamber of Commerce and Tourism and Colac Otway Shire. Whilst the group recognised that funding for multi-stakeholder coastal initiatives was a nation-wide problem, the fact remains that resourcing is a recurring problem with the implementation of coastal plans that needs to be addressed.

Council strongly supports the outcome of this meeting, which was that we request the State Government to establish (and fund) a pilot project to enable targeted implementation of the actions in the Plan for the Apollo Bay, Skenes Creek and Marengo section of the coast. There is significant potential for this pilot to provide a valuable set of learnings to help improve implementation of regional coastal plan actions along all of the Victorian coast in the longer term.

For a pilot project to be successful, it would require the funding of a dedicated project manager and the formation of a multi-agency steering committee. The project manager could report to the Western Coastal Board or a range of other State agencies (eg DELWP). The representation from the key government and community agencies would need to be of senior level and the cost of their time provided as an in-kind contribution by each agency. The first action for such a Committee and the Project Manager would be to develop a targeted implementation plan for this section of coast that provides more detail on what exactly needs to be done, what the costs are, and who will take responsibility for implementation.

We believe that a significant budget should be allocated by the State Government for implementation of the priority actions emerging from the implementation plan. It is envisioned that this approach could lead to more effective implementation of the broader actions in the Plan at the local level in an efficient and integrated manner, and provide a forum for cross organisational integration of approach which does not occur currently.





Council agrees that the six Key Regional Coastal Issues outlined in the Plan are significant but there are other issues that should also be identified in the Plan that are explained below.

Managing population growth and emergencies on the coast

The Plan identifies that managing visitation pressure is a key issue but permanent relocation is also expected to increase along the coast. Council believes the Plan should identify where the key areas along the coast are where population growth can and should occur in a sustainable manner.

With more people living in and using the regional coastline there is an increased likelihood of people being exposed to emergencies associated with bushfire. Coastal towns are some of the highest bushfire risk areas and often have a significant swelling of population at the time they are most vulnerable. Although it is very difficult to find suitable locations for Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs) in small coastal towns, even in towns where there are designated NSPs, it is well recognised that people still tend to be drawn to the beach as a place of last resort. The Plan should recognise that more work needs to be done to enable coastal areas and the associated infrastructure to be better able to provide shelter for people during a bushfire especially in towns where access is restricted.

Managing a sustainable energy industry on the coast

The Plan does not recognise the need for a fully integrated approach to coastal energy resources. There should be clarification in the Plan about the value/place for wind energy production. Council is not advocating for or against wind energy but recommends that the Plan should give an indication of its place in the coastal zone. The existing Policy and Planning Guidelines for Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria produced in 2012 provides advice about locations in the state that are not appropriate to locate wind energy facilities and provide a framework to ensure proposals for wind energy facilities are thoroughly assessed. The guidelines specifically state that wind energy facilities are not permitted in National Parks and or within five kilometres of the high water mark of the Great Ocean Road area. While these restrictions account for the majority of the coastal area in Colac Otway Shire the guidelines also identify exceptions to the prohibitions. Accordingly it would be appropriate for the Plan to make mention of wind energy production alongside the other renewable energy sources and potentially indicate whether there is a need for further action on the place of wind farms on the coast.

Managing flooding and erosion along the coast

While Chapter 6 in the Plan addresses flooding and erosion issues, Council has some specific comments to make in relation to these issues. It should be a priority for the State Government to provide direction to enable consistent decision making by Councils along the coast, particularly in the areas identified in the Plan as being vulnerable to erosion and/or prone to storm surge. There is a lack of policy direction for planners when considering planning permit applications, exposing the risk of ad-hoc decision making along the coast, which does not appropriately plan for future storm surge events and erosion.

Council would support the coastal hazard assessment along the section of coast identified in the Plan. Funding needs to be provided by the State Government to achieve this. There is a real need for “3rd pass” mapping of future sea flooding and coastal erosion along our part of the coastline, which requires significant funding from non-local government sources. Pilot studies are occurring in the Bellarine Peninsula, Lakes Entrance and at Port Fairy of this nature, and it is important that such funding is extended to provide these studies along the balance of the coastline, in order to provide more accurate mapping and policy responses to issues such as the future of the Great Ocean Road alignment.

