

Tuesday, 17 March 2015

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Dear Sir/Madam

RE: GIPPSLAND REGIONAL COASTAL PLAN 2015-2020 DRAFT

Thank you for providing BWV with the opportunity to comment on the subject draft plan.

BWV represents the common interests of over 70 Victorian bushwalking clubs, with in excess of 8,000 members. BWV also aims to proactively represent the interests of all recreational walkers in Victoria as well as walkers visiting from interstate and overseas. One of the common interests of BWV clubs and their members is the conservation of the ecosystems and natural landscapes through which they walk, so that they can enjoy the maximum variety of native flora and fauna and unspoilt scenery and ensure their preservation for future generations. Founded in 1934, BWV has a long history of active interest in conservation, including being one of a group of like-minded organisations pressing for legislation to create a comprehensive system of national parks in Victoria as early as the 1940s.

Much of the draft report represents laudable planning practices with which BWV has no quibble. However, there are a few areas of concern to us, and these are outlined below.

BWV particularly fears for those areas described at part 4.5, section 3c, page 16 as “vulnerable parts of the landscape that provide sought-after visitor experiences where there is limited scope to reduce demand”. We would urge the Gippsland Coastal Board to do everything in its power to prevent environmental degradation associated with public overexposure in such places even if this involves periodic closure of some areas to allow environmental recovery to occur.

The plan states (part 1.2, fifth column, section 3, page 2; part 6.2, section 3, page 25; part 8, last block, section 3, page 28) that it is proposed to “Develop methodologies for conducting flood and erosion studies in coastal areas”. BWV assumes that this means “build upon”, rather than designing the methodologies from scratch, as we believe that such methodologies have been extant for a long period of time. We would suggest that, to avoid any ambiguity, the plan uses the word “refine” rather than the word “develop” in the relevant sections. This has been done in segments that appear on pages 25 and 28 of the Western Regional Coastal Plan 2015-2020 Draft.

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BWV notes (Appendix 3, left column, second block, page 32 under Victorian Coastal Strategy actions) that there is no mention of environmental factors associated with the objective of facilitating tourism. Further, the way the plan proposes to implement that strategic objective (right column, second block) - "Managing regional visitation pressures and maximising access" - also says nothing specific about environmental considerations, although if the reader drills down far enough there is some concern for "vulnerable parts of the landscape" (see above). We would like to see much stronger evidence of environmental concern reflected throughout the plan.

Chapter 7 (pages 26-27) is devoted to "Supporting Communities Caring for the Coast", but it is probable (last block, first column, page 32) that the Victorian Coastal Strategy envisaged organisations within a category of "other stakeholders" additional to the ones identified. BWV sees itself very much as a relevant stakeholder here. Our clubs undertake many coastal walks, and the bushwalking community has a strong interest in seeing that coastal developments do not detract from our walking experience by making inroads into the local environment. We also note that the Gippsland Region's hinterland encompasses some prime walking terrain including Wilsons Promontory and a significant proportion of the Victorian High Country. We are very interested in the maintenance of, and the amenities attaching to, the walking trails that occur in the magnificently scenic, environmentally fragile areas involved. BWV would wish to see more mention of the walking opportunities available in the Region, and the aims of the Gippsland Coastal Board in relation to them, in this draft plan.

BWV has worked with Parks Victoria for several years on environmental or track maintenance projects on Snake Island (Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park) and in Wilsons Promontory National Park, which provides further evidence that we are a significant stakeholder in relation to planning for this Region, and should accordingly be kept abreast of developments.

We trust that the Gippsland Coastal Board will carefully take our views into account when deciding upon the final version of this report.

Yours sincerely

